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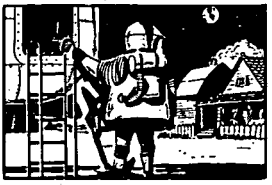

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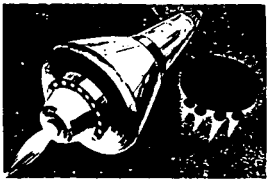

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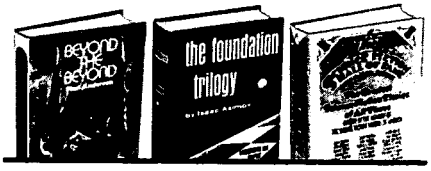

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This story—about a detective in pursuit of a legend from ancient Earth, a legend that makes a mysterious appearance on a planet three quarters of a light-century from Earth—is a fine illustration of Poul Anderson's excellence as scientist, poet, storyteller. His is a rare talent; it is detailed in the following essays on Mr. Anderson (by Gordon R. Dickson) and his work (by James Blish); and it has earned him a deservedly large following who we hope will be as pleased with this special issue as we are to publish it.

The following are the author's notes on the title: "The Queen of Air and Darkness" is a figure of unknown antiquity who continues to haunt the present day. T. H. White, in The Once and Future King, *identified her with Morgan le Fay. Before him, A. E. Housman had written one of his most enigmatic poems about her. But actually the title—a counterpart to the traditional attributes of Satan—is borne by the demonic female who appears over the centuries in many legends and many guises. She is Lilith of rabbinical lore, who in turn goes back to Babylonian antiquity; she is the great she-jinni of the Arabs; the Persians and Hindus told similar stories; the Japanese were particularly afraid of* kami *who had the form of women; American Indians, especially those of the great Athabascan family, dreaded one who went hurrying through the sky at night. In medieval Europe, one of her shapes, among others, is that of the mistress of the elf hill, against whom Scottish and Danish ballads warn the belated traveler, and who reappears in the Tannhäuser story. Her weapon is always the beauty and—in the old sense of the word—the charm by which she lures men away from her enemy God. Certain finds lead me to suspect that they knew about her in the Old Stone Age, and she will surely go on into the future.*

THE QUEEN OF AIR AND DARKNESS

by Poul Anderson

THE LAST GLOW OF THE LAST sunset would linger almost until midwinter. But there would be no more day, and the northlands rejoiced. Blossoms opened, flamboyance on firethorn trees, steelflowers rising blue from the brok and rainplant that cloaked all hills, shy whiteness of kiss-me-never down in the dales. Flitteries

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darted among them on iridescent wings; a crownbuck shook his horns and bugled. Between horizons the sky deepened from purple to sable. Both moons were aloft, nearly full, shining frosty on leaves and molten on waters. The shadows they made were blurred by an aurora, a great blowing curtain of light across half heaven. Behind it the earliest stars had come out.

A boy and a girl sat on Wolund's Barrow just under the dolmen it upbore. Their hair, which streamed halfway down their backs, showed startlingly forth, bleached as it was by summer. Their bodies, still dark from that season, merged with earth and bush and rock, for they wore only garlands. He played on a bone flute and she sang. They had lately become lovers. Their age was about sixteen, but they did not know this, considering themselves Outlings and thus indifferent to time, remembering little or nothing of how they had once dwelt in the lands of men.

His notes piped cold around her voice:

"Cast a spell,
weave it well
of dust and dew
and night and you."

A brook by the grave mound, carrying moonlight down to a hill-hidden river, answered with its rapids. A flock of hellbats passed black beneath the aurora.

A shape came bounding over Cloudmoor. It had two arms and two legs, but the legs were long and claw-footed and feathers covered it to the end of a tail and broad wings. The face was half human, dominated by its eyes. Had Ayoch been able to stand wholly erect, he would have reached to the boy's shoulder.

The girl rose. "He carries a burden," she said. Her vision was not meant for twilight like that of a northland creature born, but she had learned how to use every sign her senses gave her. Besides the fact that ordinarily a pook would fly, there was a heaviness to his haste.

"And he comes from the south." Excitement jumped in the boy, sudden as a green flame that went across the constellation Lyrth. He sped down the mound. "Ohoi, Ayoch!" he called, "Me here, Mistherd!"

"And Shadow-of-a-Dream," the girl laughed, following.

The pook halted. He breathed louder than the soughing in the growth around him. A smell of bruised yerba lifted where he stood.

"Well met in winterbirth," he whistled. "You can help me bring this to Carheddin."

He held out what he bore. His eyes were yellow lanterns above. It moved and whimpered.

"Why, a child," Mistherd said. "Even as you were, my son,

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even as you were. Ho, ho, what a snatch!" Ayoch boasted. "They were a score in yon camp by Fallowwood, armed, and besides watcher engines they had big ugly dogs aprowl while they slept. I came from above, however, having spied on them till I knew that a handful of dazedust—"

"The poor thing." Shadow-of-a-Dream took the boy and held him to her small breasts. "So full of sleep yet, aren't you?" Blindly, he sought a nipple. She smiled through the veil of her hair. "No, I am still too young, and you already too old. But come, when you wake in Carheddin under the mountain, you shall feast."

"Yo-ah," said Ayoch very softly. "She is abroad and has heard and seen. She comes." He crouched down, wings folded. After a moment Mistherd knelt, and then Shadow-of-a-Dream, though she did not let go the child.

The Queen's tall form blocked off the moons. For a while she regarded the three and their booty. Hill and moor sounds withdrew from their awareness until it seemed they could hear the northlights hiss.

At last Ayoch whispered, "Have I done well, Starmother?"

"If you stole a babe from a camp full of engines," said the beautiful voice, "then they were folk out of the far south who may not endure it as meekly as yeomen."

"But what can they do, Snowmaker?" the pook asked. "How can they track us?"

Mistherd lifted his head and spoke in pride. "Also, now they too have felt the awe of us."

"And he is a cuddly dear," Shadow-of-a-Dream said. "And we need more like him, do we not, Lady Sky?"

"It had to happen in some twilight," agreed she who stood above. "Take him onward and care for him. By this sign," which she made, "is he claimed for the Dwellers."

Their joy was freed. Ayoch cartwheeled over the ground till he reached a shiverleaf. There he swarmed up the trunk and out on a limb, perched half hidden by unrestful pale foliage, and crowed. Boy and girl bore the child toward Carheddin at an easy distance-devouring lope which let him pipe and her sing:

"Wahaii, wahaii!
Wayala, laii!
Wing on the wind
high over heaven,
shrilly shrieking,
rush with the rainspears,
tumble through tumult,
drift to the moonhoar trees and the dream-heavy shadows beneath them,
and rock in, be one with the clinking wavelets of lakes where the starbeams drown."

* * *

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As she entered, Barbro Cullen felt, through all grief and fury, stabbed by dismay. The room was unkempt. Journals, tapes, reels, codices, file boxes, bescribbled papers were piled on every table. Dust filmed most shelves and corners. Against one wall stood a laboratory setup, microscope and analytical equipment. She recognized it as compact and efficient, but it was not what you would expect in an office, and it gave the air a faint chemical reek. The rug was threadbare, the furniture shabby.

This was her final chance?

Then Eric Sherrinford approached. "Good day, Mrs. Cullen," he said. His tone was crisp, his handclasp firm. His faded gripsuit didn't bother her. She wasn't inclined to fuss about her own appearance except on special occasions. (And would she ever again have one, unless she got back Jimmy?) What she observed was a cat's personal neatness.

A smile radiated in crow's feet from his eyes. "Forgive my bachelor housekeeping. On Beowulf we have—we had, at any rate, machines for that, so I never acquired the habit myself, and I don't want a hireling disarranging my tools. More convenient to work out of my apartment than keep a separate office. Won't you be seated?"

"No, thanks. I couldn't," she mumbled.

"I understand. But if you'll excuse me, I function best in a relaxed position."

He jackknifed into a lounger. One long shank crossed the other knee. He drew forth a pipe and stuffed it from a pouch. Barbro wondered why he took tobacco in so ancient a way. Wasn't Beowulf supposed to have the up-to-date equipment that they still couldn't afford to build on Roland? Well, of course old customs might survive anyhow. They generally did in colonies, she remembered reading. People had moved starward in the hope of preserving such outmoded things as their mother tongues or constitutional government or rational-technological civilization. . . .

Sherrinford pulled her up from the confusion of her weariness: "You must give me the details of your case, Mrs. Cullen. You've simply told me your son was kidnaped and your local constabulary did nothing. Otherwise, I know just a few obvious facts, such as your being widowed rather than divorced; and you're the daughter of outwayers in Olga Ivanoff Land who, nevertheless, kept in close telecommunication with Christmas Landing; and you're trained in one of the biological professions; and you had several years' hiatus in field work until recently you started again."

She gaped at the high-cheeked, beak-nosed, black-haired and gray-

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eyed countenance. His lighter made a *scrit* and a flare which seemed to fill the room. Quietness dwelt on this height above the city, and winter dusk was seeping through the windows. "How in cosmos do you know that?" she heard herself exclaim.

He shrugged and fell into the lecturer's manner for which he was notorious. "My work depends on noticing details and fitting them together. In more than a hundred years on Roland, tending to cluster according to their origins and thought-habits, people have developed regional accents. You have a trace of the Olgan burr, but you nasalize your vowels in the style of this area, though you live in Portolondon. That suggests steady childhood exposure to metropolitan speech. You were part of Matsuyama's expedition, you told me, and took your boy along. They wouldn't have allowed any ordinary technician to do that; hence, you had to be valuable enough to get away with it. The team was conducting ecological research; therefore, you must be in the life sciences. For the same reason, you must have had previous field experience.But your skin is fair, showing none of the leatheriness one gets from prolonged exposure to this sun. Accordingly, you must have been mostly indoors for a good while before you went on your ill-fated trip. As for widowhood—you never mentioned a husband to me, but you have had a man whom you thought so highly of that you still wear both the wedding and the engagement ring he gave you."

Her sight blurred and stung. The last of those words had brought Tim back, huge, ruddy, laughterful and gentle. She must turn from this other person and stare outward. "Yes," she achieved saying, "you're right."

The apartment occupied a hilltop above Christmas Landing. Beneath it the city dropped away in walls, roofs, archaistic chimneys and lamplit streets, goblin lights of human-piloted vehicles, to the harbor, the sweep of Venture Bay, ships bound to and from the Sunward Islands and remoter regions of the Boreal Ocean, which glimmered like mercury in the afterglow of Charlemagne. Oliver was swinging rapidly higher, a mottled orange disc a full degree wide; closer to the zenith which it could never reach, it would shine the color of ice. Alde, half the seeming size, was a thin slow crescent near Sirius, which she remembered was near Sol, but you couldn't see Sol without a telescope—

"Yes," she said around the pain in her throat, "my husband is about four years dead. I was carrying our first child when he was killed by a stampeding monocerus. We'd been married three years before. Met while we were both at

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the University—'casts from School Central can only supply a basic education, you know— We founded our own team to do ecological studies under contract—you know, can a certain area be settled while maintaining a balance of nature, what crops will grow, what hazards, that sort of question— Well, afterward I did lab work for a fisher co-op in Portolondon. But the monotony, the . . . shut-inness . . . was eating me away. Professor Matsuyama offered me a position on the team he was organizing to examine Commissioner Hauch Land. I thought, God help me, I thought Jimmy—Tim wanted him named James, once the tests showed it'd be a boy, after his own father and because of 'Timmy and Jimmy' and —oh, I thought Jimmy could safely come along. I couldn't bear to leave him behind for months, not at his age. We could make sure he'd never wander out of camp. What could hurt him inside it? *I* had never believed those stories about the Outlings stealing human children. I supposed parents were trying to hide from themselves the fact they'd been careless, they'd let a kid get lost in the woods or attacked by a pack of satans or— well, I learned better, Mr. Sherrinford. The guard robots were evaded and the dogs were drugged and when I woke, Jimmy was gone."

He regarded her through the smoke from his pipe. Barbro Engdahl Cullen was a big woman of thirty or so (Rolandic years, he reminded himself, ninety-five percent of Terrestrial, not the same as Beowulfan years), broad-shouldered, long-legged, full-breasted, supple of stride; her face was wide, straight nose, straightforward hazel eyes, heavy but mobile mouth; her hair was reddish-brown, cropped below the ears, her voice husky, her garment a plain street robe. To still the writhing of her fingers, he asked skeptically, "Do you now believe in the Outlings?"

"No. I'm just not so sure as I was." She swung about with half a glare for him. "And we have found traces."

"Bits of fossils," he nodded. "A few artifacts of a neolithic sort. But apparently ancient, as if the makers died ages ago. Intensive search has failed to turn up any real evidence for their survival."

"How intensive can search be, in a summer-stormy, winter-gloomy wilderness around the North Pole?" she demanded. "When we are, how many, a million people on an entire planet, half of us crowded into this one city?"

"And the rest crowding this one habitable continent," he pointed out.

"Arctica covers five million square kilometers," she flung back. "The Arctic Zone proper covers a

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fourth of it. We haven't the industrial base to establish satellite monitor stations, build aircraft we can trust in those parts, drive roads through the damned darklands and establish permanent bases and get to know them and tame them. Good Christ, generations of lonely outwaymen told stories about Graymantle, and the beast was never seen by a proper scientist till last year!"

"Still, you continue to doubt the reality of the Outlings?"

"Well, what about a secret cult among humans, born of isolation and ignorance, lairing in the wilderness, stealing children when they can for—" She swallowed. Her head drooped. "But you're supposed to be the expert."

"From what you told me over the visiphone, the Portolondon constabulary questions the accuracy of the report your group made, thinks the lot of you were hysterical, claims you must have omitted a due precaution, and the child toddled away and was lost beyond your finding."

His dry words pried the horror out of her. Flushing, she snapped, "Like any settler's kid? No. I didn't simply yell. I consulted Data Retrieval. A few too many such cases are recorded for accident to be a very plausible explanation. And shall we totally ignore the frightened stories about reappearances? But when I went back to the constabulary with my facts, they brushed me off. I suspect that was not entirely because they're undermanned. I think they're afraid too. They're recruited from country boys, and Portolondon lies near the edge of the unknown."

Her energy faded. "Roland hasn't got any central police force," she finished drably. "You're my last hope."

The man puffed smoke into twilight, with which it blent, before he said in a kindlier voice than hitherto: "Please don't make it a high hope, Mrs. Cullen. I'm the solitary private investigator on this world, having no resources beyond myself, and a newcomer to boot."

"How long have you been here?"

"Twelve years. Barely time to get a little familiarity with the relatively civilized coastlands. You settlers of a century or more—what do you, even, know about Arctica's interior?"

Sherrinford sighed. "I'll take the case, charging no more than I must, mainly for the sake of the experience," he said. "But only if you'll be my guide and assistant, however painful it will be for you."

"Of course! I dreaded waiting idle. Why me, though?"

"Hiring someone else as well qualified would be prohibitively expensive, on a pioneer planet where every hand has a thousand

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urgent tasks to do. Besides, you have a motive. And I'll need that. who was born on another world altogether strange to this one, itself altogether strange to Mother Earth, I am too dauntingly aware of how handicapped we are."

Night gathered upon Christmas Landing. The air stayed mild, but glimmer-lit tendrils of fog, sneaking through the streets, had a cold look, and colder yet was the aurora where it shuddered between the moons. The woman drew closer to the man in this darkening room, surely not aware that she did, until he switched on a fluoropanel. The same knowledge of Roland's aloneness was in both of them.

One light-year is not much as galactic distances go. You could walk it in about 270 million years, beginning at the middle of the Permian Era, when dinosaurs belonged to the remote future, and continuing to the present day when spaceships cross even greater reaches. But stars in our neighborhood average some nine light-years apart, and barely one percent of them have planets which are man-habitable, and speeds are limited to less than that of radiation. Scant help is given by relativistic time contraction and suspended animation en route. These make the journeys seem short, but history meanwhile does not stop at home.

Thus voyages from sun to sun will always be few. Colonists will be those who have extremely special reasons for going. They will take along germ plasm for exogenetic cultivation of domestic plants and animals—and of human infants, in order that population can grow fast enough to escape death through genetic drift. After all, they cannot rely on further immigration. Two or three times a century, a ship may call from some other colony. (Not from Earth. Earth has long ago sunk into alien concerns.) Its place of origin will be an old settlement. The young ones are in no position to build and man interstellar vessels.

Their very survival, let alone their eventual modernization, is in doubt. The founding fathers have had to take what they could get, in a universe not especially designed for man.

Consider, for example, Roland. It is among the rare happy finds, a world where humans can live, breathe, eat the food, drink the water, walk unclad if they choose, sow their crops, pasture their beasts, dig their mines, erect their homes, raise their children and grandchildren. It is worth crossing three quarters of a light-century to preserve certain dear values and strike new roots into the soil of Roland.

But the star Charlemagne is of type F9, forty percent brighter

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than Sol, brighter still in the treacherous ultraviolet and wilder still in the wind of charged particles that seethes from it. The planet has an eccentric orbit. In the middle of the short but furious northern summer, which includes periastron, total insolation is more than double what Earth gets; in the depth of the long northern winter, it is barely less than Terrestrial average.

Native life is abundant everywhere. But lacking elaborate machinery, not yet economically possible to construct for more than a few specialists, man can only endure the high latitudes. A ten-degree axial tilt, together with the orbit, means that the northern part of the Arctican continent spends half its year in unbroken sunlessness. Around the South Pole lies an empty ocean.

Other differences from Earth might superficially seem more important. Roland has two moons, small but close, to evoke clashing tides. It rotates once in thirty-two hours, which is endlessly, subtly disturbing to organisms evolved through gigayears of a quicker rhythm. The weather patterns are altogether unterrestrial. The globe is a mere 9500 kilometers in diameter; its surface gravity is 0.42 x 980 cm/sec^2; the sea level air pressure is slightly above one Earth atmosphere. (For actually Earth is the freak, and man exists because a cosmic accident blew away most of the gas that a body its size ought to have kept, as Venus has done.)

However, Homo can truly be called sapiens when he practices his specialty of being unspecialized. His repeated attempts to freeze himself into an all-answering pattern or culture or ideology, or whatever he has named it, have repeatedly brought ruin. Give him the pragmatic business of making his living, and he will usually do rather well. He adapts, within broad limits.

These limits are set by such factors as his need for sunlight and his being, necessarily and forever, a part of the life that surrounds him and a creature of the spirit within.

Portolondon thrust docks, boats, machinery, warehouses into the Gulf of Polaris. Behind them huddled the dwellings of its 5000 permanent inhabitants: concrete walls, storm shutters, high-peaked tile roofs. The gaiety of their paint looked forlorn amidst lamps; this town lay past the Arctic Circle.

Nevertheless Sherrinford remarked, "Cheerful place, eh? The kind of thing I came to Roland looking for."

Barbro made no reply. The days in Christmas Landing, while he made his preparations, had drained her. Gazing out the dome of the taxi that was whirring them downtown from the hydrofoil that

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brought them, she supposed he meant the lushness of forest and meadows along the road, brilliant hues and phosphorescence of flowers in gardens, clamor of wings overhead. Unlike Terrestrial flora in cold climates, Arctican vegetation spends every daylit hour in frantic growth and energy storage. Not till summer's fever gives place to gentle winter does it bloom and fruit; and estivating animals rise from their dens and migratory birds come home.

The view was lovely, she had to admit: beyond the trees, a spaciousness climbing toward remote heights, silvery-gray under a moon, an aurora, the diffuse radiance from a sun just below the horizon.

Beautiful as a hunting satan, she thought, and as terrible. That wilderness had stolen Jimmy. She wondered if she would at least be given to find his little bones and take them to his father.

Abruptly she realized that she and Sherrinford were at their hotel and that he had been speaking of the town. Since it was next in size after the capital, he must have visited here often before. The streets were crowded and noisy; signs flickered, music blared from shops, taverns, restaurants, sports centers, dance halls; vehicles were jammed down to molasses speed; the several-stories-high office buildings stood aglow. Portolondon linked an enormous hinterland to the outside world. Down the Gloria River came timber rafts, ores, harvest of farms whose owners were slowly making Rolandic life serve them, meat and ivory and furs gathered by rangers in the mountains beyond Troll Scarp. In from the sea came coastwise freighters, the fishing fleet, produce of the Sunward Islands, plunder of whole continents further south where bold men adventured. It clanged in Portolondon, laughed, blustered, swaggered, connived, robbed, preached, guzzeled, swilled, toiled, dreamed, lusted, built, destroyed, died, was born, was happy, angry, sorrowful, greedy, vulgar, loving, ambitious, human. Neither the sun's blaze elsewhere nor the half year's twilight here—wholly night around midwinter—was going to stay man's hand.

Or so everybody said.

Everybody except those who had settled in the darklands. Barbro used to take for granted that they were evolving curious customs, legends, and superstitions, which would die when the outway had been completely mapped and controlled. Of late, she had wondered. Perhaps Sherrinford's hints, about a change in his own attitude brought about by his preliminary research, were responsible.

Or perhaps she just needed something to think about besides how Jimmy, the day before he went, when she asked him

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whether he wanted rye or French bread for a sandwich, answered in great solemnity—he was becoming interested in the alphabet—"I'll have a slice of what we people call the F bread."

She scarcely noticed getting out of the taxi, registering, being conducted to a primitively furnished room. But after she unpacked, she remembered Sherrinford had suggested a confidential conference. She went down the hall and knocked on his door. Her knuckles sounded less loud than her heart.

He opened the door, finger on lips, and gestured her toward a corner. Her temper bristled until she saw the image of Chief Constable Dawson in the visiphone. Sherrinford must have chimed him up and must have a reason to keep her out of scanner range. She found a chair and watched, nails digging into knees.

The detective's lean length refolded itself. "Pardon the interruption," he said. "A man mistook the number. Drunk, by the indications."

Dawson chuckled. "We get plenty of those." Barbro recalled his fondness for gabbing. He tugged the beard which he affected, as if he were an outwayer instead of a townsman. "No harm in them as a rule. They only have a lot of voltage to discharge, after weeks or months in the backlands."

"I've gathered that that environment—foreign in a million major and minor ways to the one that created man—I've gathered that it does do odd things to the personality." Sherrinford tamped his pipe. "Of course, you know my practice has been confined to urban and suburban areas. Isolated garths seldom need private investigators. Now that situation appears to have changed. I called to ask you for advice."

"Glad to help," Dawson said. "I've not forgotten what you did for us in the de Tahoe murder case." Cautiously: "Better explain your problem first."

Sherrinford struck fire. The smoke that followed cut through the green odors—even here, a paved pair of kilometers from the nearest woods—that drifted past traffic rumble through a crepuscular window. "This is more a scientific mission than a search for an absconding debtor or an industrial spy," he drawled. "I'm looking into two possibilities: that an organization, criminal or religious or whatever, has long been active and steals infants; or that the Outlings of folklore are real."

"Huh?" On Dawson's face Barbro read as much dismay as surprise. "You can't be serious!"

"Can't I?" Sherrinford smiled. "Several generations' worth of reports shouldn't be dismissed out of hand. Especially not when they become more frequent and consistent in the course of time, not less. Nor can we ignore the docu-

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mented loss of babies and small children, amounting by now to over a hundred, and never a trace found afterward. Nor the finds which demonstrate that an intelligent species once inhabited Arctica and may still haunt the interior."

Dawson leaned forward as if to climb out of the screen. "Who engaged you?" he demanded. "That Cullen woman? We were sorry for her, naturally, but she wasn't making sense, and when she got downright abusive—"

"Didn't her companions, reputable scientists, confirm her story?"

"No story to confirm. Look, they had the place ringed with detectors and alarms, and they kept mastiffs. Standard procedure in country where a hungry sauroid or whatever might happen by. Nothing could've entered unbenownst."

"On the ground. How about a flyer landing in the middle of camp?"

"A man in a copter rig would've roused everybody."

"A winged being might be quieter."

"A living flyer that could lift a three-year-old boy? Doesn't exist."

"Isn't in the scientific literature, you mean, Constable. Remember Graymantle; remember how little we know about Roland, a planet, an entire world. Such birds do exist on Beowulf—and on Rustum, I've read. I made a calculation from the local ratio of air density to gravity, and, yes, it's marginally possible here too. The child could have been carried off for a short distance before wing muscles were exhausted and the creature must descend."

Dawson snorted. "First it landed and walked into the tent where mother and boy were asleep. Then it walked away, toting him, after it couldn't fly further. Does that sound like a bird of prey? And the victim didn't cry out, the dogs didn't bark!"

"As a matter of fact," Sherrinford said, "those inconsistencies are the most interesting and convincing features of the whole account. You're right, it's hard to see how a human kidnaper could get in undetected, and an eagle type of creature wouldn't operate in that fashion. But none of this applies to a winged intelligent being. The boy could have been drugged. Certainly the dogs showed signs of having been."

"The dogs showed signs of having overslept. Nothing had disturbed them. The kid wandering by wouldn't do so. We don't need to assume one damn thing except, first, that he got restless and, second, that the alarms were a bit sloppily rigged—seeing as how no danger was expected from inside camp—and let him pass out. And, third, I hate to speak this way, but we must assume the poor tyke starved or was killed."

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Dawson paused before adding: "If we had more staff, we could have given the affair more time. And would have, of course. We did make an aerial sweep, which risked the lives of the pilots, using instruments which would've spotted the kid anywhere in a fifty- kilometer radius, unless he was dead. You know how sensitive thermal analyzers are. We drew a complete blank. We have more important jobs than to hunt for the scattered pieces of a corpse."

He finished brusquely. "If Mrs. Cullen's hired you, my advice is you find an excuse to quit. Better for her, too. She's got to come to terms with reality."

Barbro checked a shout by biting her tongue.

"Oh, this is merely the latest disappearance of the series," Sherrinford said. She didn't understand how he could maintain his easy tone when Jimmy was lost. "More thoroughly recorded than any before, thus more suggestive. Usually an outwayer family has given a tearful but undetailed account of their child who vanished and must have been stolen by the Old Folk. Sometimes, years later, they'd tell about glimpses of what they swore must have been the grown child, not really human any longer, flitting past in murk or peering through a window or working mischief upon them. As you say, neither the authorities nor the scientists have had personnel or resources to mount a proper investigation. But as I say, the matter appears to be worth investigating. Maybe a private party like myself can contribute."

"Listen, most of us constables grew up in the outway. We don't just ride patrol and answer emergency calls; we go back there for holidays and reunions. If any gang of . . . of human sacrificers was around, we'd know."

"I realize that. I also realize that the people you came from have a widespread and deep-seated belief in nonhuman beings with supernatural powers. Many actually go through rites and make offerings to propitiate them."

"I know what you're leading up to," Dawson fleered. "I've heard it before, from a hundred sensationalists. The aborigines are the Outlings. I thought better of you. Surely you've visited a museum or three, surely you've read literature from planets which do have natives—or damn and blast, haven't you ever applied that logic of yours?"

He wagged a finger. "Think," he said. "What have we in fact discovered? A few pieces of worked stone; a few megaliths that might be artificial; scratchings on rock that seem to show plants and animals, though not the way any human culture would ever have shown them; traces of fires and broken bones; other fragments of bone that seem as if they might've

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belonged to thinking creatures, as if they might've been inside fingers or around big brains. If so, however, the owners looked nothing like men. Or angels, for that matter. Nothing! The most anthropoid reconstruction I've seen shows a kind of two-legged crocagator.

"Wait, let me finish. The stories about the Outlings—oh, I've heard them too, plenty of them. I believed them when I was a kid—the stories tell how there're different kinds, some winged, some not, some half human, some completely human except maybe for being too handsome— It's fairyland from ancient Earth all over again. Isn't it? I got interested once and dug into the Heritage Library microfiles, and be damned if I didn't find almost the identical yarns, told by peasants centuries before spaceflight.

"None of it squares with the scanty relics we have, if they are relics, or with the fact that no area the size of Arctica could spawn a dozen different intelligent species, or . . . hellfire, man, with the way your common sense tells you aborigines would behave when humans arrived!"

Sherrinford nodded. "Yes, yes," he said. "I'm less sure than you that the common sense of nonhuman beings is precisely like our own. I've seen so much variation within mankind. But, granted, your arguments are strong. Roland's too few scientists have more pressing tasks than tracking down the origins of what is, as you put it, a revived medieval superstition."

He cradled his pipe bowl in both hands and peered into the tiny hearth of it. "Perhaps what interests me most," he said softly, "is why—across that gap of centuries, across a barrier of machine civilization and its utterly antagonistic world view—no continuity of tradition whatsoever—why have hard-headed, technologically organized, reasonably well-educated colonists here brought back from its grave a belief in the Old Folk?"

"I suppose eventually, if the University ever does develop the psychology department they keep talking about, I suppose eventually somebody will get a thesis out of your question." Dawson spoke in a jagged voice, and he gulped when Sherrinford replied:

"I propose to begin now. In Commissioner Hauch Land, since that's where the latest incident occurred. Where can I rent a vehicle?"

"Uh, might be hard to do—"

"Come, come. Tenderfoot or not, I know better. In an economy of scarcity, few people own heavy equipment. But since it's needed, it can always be rented. I want a camper bus with a ground-effect drive suitable for every kind of terrain. And I want certain equip-

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ment installed which I've brought along, and the top canopy section replaced by a gun turret controllable from the driver's seat. But I'll supply the weapons. Besides rifles and pistols of my own, I've arranged to borrow some artillery from Christmas Landing's police arsenal."

"Hoy? Are you genuinely intending to make ready for . . . a war . . . against a myth?"

"Let's say I'm taking out insurance, which isn't terribly expensive, against a remote possibility. Now, besides the bus, what about a light aircraft carried piggyback for use in surveys?"

"No." Dawson sounded more positive than hitherto. "That's asking for disaster. We can have you flown to a base camp in a large plane when the weather report's exactly right. But the pilot will have to fly back at once, before the weather turns wrong again. Meteorology's underdeveloped on Roland; the air's especially treacherous this time of year, and we're not tooled up to produce aircraft that can outlive every surprise." He drew breath. "Have you no idea of how fast a whirly-whirly can hit, or what size hailstones might strike from a clear sky, or—? Once you're there, man, you stick to the ground." He hesitated. "That's an important reason our information is so scanty about the outway and its settlers are so isolated."

Sherrinford laughed ruefully. "Well, I suppose if details are what I'm after, I must creep along anyway."

"You'll waste a lot of time," Dawson said. "Not to mention your client's money. Listen, I can't forbid you to chase shadows, but—"

The discussion went on for almost an hour. When the screen finally blanked, Sherrinford rose, stretched, and walked toward Barbro. She noticed anew his peculiar gait. He had come from a planet with a fourth again of Earth's gravitational drag, to one where weight was less than half Terrestrial. She wondered if he had flying dreams.

"I apologize for shuffling you off like that," he said. "I didn't expect to reach him at once. He was quite truthful about how busy he is. But having made contact, I didn't want to remind him overmuch of you. He can dismiss my project as a futile fantasy which I'll soon give up. But he might have frozen completely, might even have put up obstacles before us, if he'd realized through you how determined we are."

"Why should he care?" she asked in her bitterness.

"Fear of consequences, the worse because it is unadmitted—fear of consequences, the more terrifying because they are unguessable." Sherrinford's gaze went to the screen, and thence out the window to the aurora pulsing in

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glacial blue and white immensely far overhead. "I suppose you saw I was talking to a frightened man. Down underneath his conventionality and scoffing, he believes in the Outlings—oh, yes, he believes."

The feet of Mistherd flew over yerba and outpaced windblown driftweed. Beside him, black and misshapen, hulked Nagrim the nicor, whose earthquake weight left a swath of crushed plants. Behind, luminous blossoms of a firethorn shone through the twining, trailing outlines of Morgarel the wraith.

Here Cloudmoor rose in a surf of hills and thickets. The air lay quiet, now and then carrying the distance-muted howl of a beast. It was darker than usual at winterbirth, the moons being down and aurora a wan flicker above mountains on the northern world-edge. But this made the stars keen, and their numbers crowded heaven, and Ghost Road shone among them as if it, like the leafage beneath, were paved with dew.

"Yonder!" bawled Nagrim. All four of his arms pointed. The party had topped a ridge. Far off glimmered a spark. "Hoah, hoah! 'Ull we right off stamp dem flat, or pluck dem apart slow?"

We shall do nothing of the sort, bonebrain, Morgarel's answer slid through their heads. *Not unless they attack us, and they will not unless we make them aware of us, and her command is that we spy out their purposes.*

"Gr-r-rum-m-m. I know deir aim. Cut down trees, stick plows in land, sow deir cursed seed in de clods and in deir shes. 'Less we drive dem into de bitterwater, and soon, soon, dey'll wax too strong for us."

"Not too strong for the Queen!" Mistherd protested, shocked.

Yet they do have new powers, it seems, Morgarel reminded him. *Carefully must we probe them.*

"Den carefully can we step on dem?" asked Nagrim.

The question woke a grin out of Mistherd's own uneasiness. He slapped the scaly back. "Don't talk, you," he said. "It hurts my ears. Nor think; that hurts your head. Come, run!"

Ease yourself, Morgarel scolded. *You have too much life in you, human-born.*

Mistherd made a face at the wraith, but obeyed to the extent of slowing down and picking his way through what cover the country afforded. For he traveled on behalf of the Fairest, to learn what had brought a pair of mortals questing hither.

Did they seek that boy whom Ayoch stole? (He continued to weep for his mother, though less and less often as the marvels of Carheddin entered him.) Perhaps. A birdcraft had left them

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and their car at the now-abandoned campsite, from which they had followed an outward spiral. But when no trace of the cub had appeared inside a reasonable distance, they did not call to be flown home. And this wasn't because weather forbade the farspeaker waves to travel, as was frequently the case. No, instead the couple set off toward the mountains of Moonhorn. Their course would take them past a few outlying invader steadings and on into realms untrodden by their race.

So this was no ordinary survey. Then what was it?

Mistherd understood now why she who reigned had made her adopted mortal children learn, or retain, the clumsy language of their forebears. He had hated that drill, wholly foreign to Dweller ways. Of course, you obeyed her, and in time you saw how wise she had been. . . .

Presently he left Nagrim behind a rock—the nicor would only be useful in a fight—and crawled from bush to bush until he lay within man-lengths of the humans. A rainplant drooped over him, leaves soft on his bare skin, and clothed him in darkness. Morgarel floated to the crown of a shiverleaf, whose unrest would better conceal his flimsy shape. He'd not be much help either. And that was the most troublous, the almost appalling thing here. Wraiths were among those who could not just sense and send thoughts, but cast illusions. Morgarel had reported that this time his power seemed to rebound off an invisible cold wall around the car.

Otherwise the male and female had set up no guardian engines and kept no dogs. Belike they supposed none would be needed, since they slept in the long vehicle which bore them. But such contempt of the Queen's strength could not be tolerated, could it?

Metal sheened faintly by the light of their campfire. They sat on either side, wrapped in coats against a coolness that Mistherd, naked, found mild. The male drank smoke. The female stared past him into a dusk which her flame-dazzled eyes must see as thick gloom. The dancing glow brought her vividly forth. Yes, to judge from Ayoch's tale, she was the dam of the new cub.

Ayoch had wanted to come too, but the Wonderful One forbade. Pooks couldn't hold still long enough for such a mission.

The man sucked on his pipe. His cheeks thus pulled into shadow while the light flickered across nose and brow, he looked disquietingly like a shearbill about to stoop on prey.

"—No, I tell you again, Barbro, I have no theories," he was saying. "When facts are insufficient, theorizing is ridiculous at best, misleading at worst."

"Still, you must have some idea

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of what you're doing," she said. It was plain that they had threshed this out often before. No Dweller could be as persistent as she or as patient as he. "That gear you packed—that generator you keep running—"

"I have a working hypothesis or two, which suggested what equipment I ought to take."

"Why won't you tell me what the hypotheses are?"

"They themselves indicate that that might be inadvisable at the present time. I'm still feeling my way into the labyrinth. And I haven't had a chance yet to hook everything up. In fact, we're really only protected against so-called telepathic influence—"

"What?" She started. "Do you mean . . . those legends about how they can read minds too—" Her words trailed off and her gaze sought the darkness beyond his shoulders.

He leaned forward. His tone lost its clipped rapidity, grew earnest and soft. "Barbro, you're racking yourself to pieces. Which is no help to Jimmy if he's alive, the more so when you may well be badly needed later on. We've a long trek before us, and you'd better settle into it."

She nodded jerkily and caught her lip between her teeth for a moment before she answered, "I'm trying."

He smiled around his pipe. "I expect you'll succeed. You don't strike me as a quitter or a whiner or an enjoyer of misery."

She dropped a hand to the pistol at her belt. Her voice changed; it came out of her throat like knife from sheath. "When we find them, they'll know what I am. What humans are."

"Put anger aside also," the man urged. "We can't afford emotions. If the Outlings are real, as I told you I'm provisionally assuming, they're fighting for their homes." After a short stillness he added: "I like to think that if the first explorers had found live natives, men would not have colonized Roland. But too late now. We can't go back if we wanted to. It's a bitter-end struggle, against an enemy so crafty that he's even hidden from us the fact that he is waging war."

"Is he? I mean, skulking, kidnaping an occasional child—"

"That's part of my hypothesis. I suspect those aren't harassments, they're tactics employed in a chillingly subtle strategy."

The fire sputtered and sparked. The man smoked awhile, brooding, until he went on:

"I didn't want to raise your hopes or excite you unduly while you had to wait on me, first in Christmas Landing, then in Portolondon. Afterward we were busy satisfying ourselves that Jimmy had been taken further from camp than he could have wandered before collapsing. So I'm only now

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telling you how thoroughly I studied available material on the . . . Old Folk. Besides, at first I did it on the principle of eliminating every imaginable possibility, however absurd. I expected no result other than final disproof. But I went through everything, relics, analyses, histories, journalistic accounts, monographs; I talked to outwayers who happened to be in town and to what scientists we have who've taken any interest in the matter. I'm a quick study. I flatter myself I became as expert as anyone—though God knows there's little to be expert on. Furthermore, I, a comparative stranger to Roland, maybe looked on the problem with fresh eyes. And a pattern emerged for me.

"If the aborigines had become extinct, why hadn't they left more remnants? Arctica isn't enormous, and it's fertile for Rolandic life. It ought to have supported a population whose artifacts ought to have accumulated over millennia. I've read that on Earth, literally tens of thousands of paleolithic hand axes were found, more by chance than archeology.

"Very well. Suppose the relics and fossils were deliberately removed, between the time the last survey party left and the first colonizing ships arrived. I did find some support for that idea in the diaries of the original explorers. They were too preoccupied with checking the habitability of the planet to make catalogues of primitive monuments. However, the remarks they wrote down indicate they saw much more than later arrivals did. Suppose what we have found is just what the removers overlooked or didn't get around to.

"That argues a sophisticated mentality, thinking in long-range terms, doesn't it? Which in turn argues that the Old Folk were not mere hunters or neolithic farmers."

"But nobody ever saw buildings or machines or any such thing," Barbro objected.

"No. Most likely the natives didn't go through our kind of metallurgic-industrial evolution. I can conceive of other paths to take. Their full-fledged civilization might have begun, rather than ended, in biological science and technology. It might have developed potentialities of the nervous system, which might be greater in their species than in man. We have those abilities to some degree ourselves, you realize. A dowser, for instance, actually senses variations in the local magnetic field caused by a water table. However, in us, these talents are maddeningly rare and tricky. So we took our business elsewhere. Who needs to be a telepath, say, when he has a visiphone? The Old Folk may have seen it the other way around. The artifacts of their civilization may have been, may still be unrecognizable to men."

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"They could have identified themselves to the men, though," Barbro said. "Why didn't they?"

"I can imagine any number of reasons. As, they could have had a bad experience with interstellar visitors earlier in their history. Ours is scarcely the sole race that has spaceships. However, I told you I don't theorize in advance of the facts. Let's say no more than that the Old Folk, if they exist, are alien to us."

"For a rigorous thinker, you're spinning a mighty thin thread."

"I've admitted this is entirely provisional." He squinted at her through a roil of campfire smoke. "You came to me, Barbro, insisting in the teeth of officialdom that your boy had been stolen, but your own talk about cultist kidnapers was ridiculous. Why are you reluctant to admit the reality of nonhumans?"

"In spite of the fact that Jimmy's being alive probably depends on it," she sighed. "I know." A shudder. "Maybe I don't dare admit it."

"I've said nothing thus far that hasn't been speculated about in print," he told her. "A disreputable speculation, true. In a hundred years, nobody has found valid evidence for the Outlings being more than a superstition. Still, a few people have declared it's at least possible that intelligent natives are at large in the wilderness."

"I know," she repeated. "I'm not sure, though, what has made you, overnight, take those arguments seriously."

"Well, once you got me started thinking, it occurred to me that Roland's outwayers are not utterly isolated medieval crofters. They have books, telecommunications, power tools, motor vehicles; above all, they have a modern science-oriented education. Why *should* they turn superstitious? Something must be causing it." He stopped. "I'd better not continue. My ideas go further than this; but if they're correct, it's dangerous to speak them aloud."

Mistherd's belly muscles tensed. There was danger for fair, in that shearbill head. The Garland Bearer must be warned. For a minute he wondered about summoning Nagrim to kill these two. If the nicor jumped them fast, their firearms might avail them naught. But no. They might have left word at home, or— He came back to his ears. The talk had changed course. Barbro was murmuring, "—why you stayed on Roland."

The man smiled his gaunt smile. "Well, life on Beowulf held no challenge for me. Heorot is—or was; this was decades past, remember—Heorot was densely populated, smoothly organized, boringly uniform. That was partly due to the lowland frontier, a safety valve that bled off the dissatisfied. But I lack the carbon

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dioxide tolerance necessary to live healthily down there. An expedition was being readied to make a swing around a number of colony worlds, especially those which didn't have the equipment to keep in laser contact. You'll recall its announced purpose, to seek out new ideas in science, arts, sociology, philosophy, whenever might prove valuable. I'm afraid they found little on Roland relevant to Beowulf. But I, who had wangled a berth, I saw opportunities for myself and decided to make my home here."

"Were you a detective back there, too?"

"Yes, in the official police. We had a tradition of such work in our family. Some of that may have come from the Cherokee side of it, if the name means anything to you. However, we also claimed collateral descent from one of the first private inquiry agents on record, back on Earth before spaceflight. Regardless of how true that may be, I found him a useful model. You see, an archetype—"

The man broke off. Unease crossed his features. "Best we go to sleep," he said. "We've a long distance to cover in the morning."

She looked outward. "Here is no morning."

They retired. Mistherd rose and cautiously flexed limberness back into his muscles. Before returning to the Sister of Lyrth, he risked a glance through a pane in the car. Bunks were made up, side by side, and the humans lay in them. Yet the man had not touched her, though hers was a bonny body, and nothing that had passed between them suggested he meant to do so.

Eldritch, humans. Cold and clay-like. And they would overrun the beautiful wild world? Mistherd spat in disgust. It must not happen. It would not happen. She who reigned had vowed that.

The lands of William Irons were immense. But this was because a barony was required to support him, his kin and cattle, on native crops whose cultivation was still poorly understood. He raised some Terrestrial plants as well, by summerlight and in conservatories. However, these were a luxury. The true conquest of northern Arctica lay in yerba hay, in bathyrhiza wood, in pericoup and glycophyllon, and eventually, when the market had expanded with population and industry, in chalcanthemum for city florists and pelts of cage-bred rover for city furriers.

That was in a tomorrow Irons did not expect that he would live to see. Sherrinford wondered if the man really expected anyone ever would.

The room was warm and bright. Cheerfulness crackled in the fireplace. Light from fluoropanels gleamed off hand-carven

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chests and chairs and tables, off colorful draperies and shelved dishes. The outwayer sat solid in his high seat, stoutly clad, beard flowing down his chest. His wife and daughters brought coffee, whose fragrance joined the remnant odors of a hearty supper, to him, his guests, and his sons.

But outside, wind hooted, lightning flared, thunder bawled, rain crashed on roof and walls and roared down to swirl among the courtyard cobblestones. Sheds and barns crouched against hugeness beyond. Trees groaned, and did a wicked undertone of laughter run beneath the lowing of a frightened cow? A burst of hailstones hit the tiles like knocking knuckles.

You could feel how distant your neighbors were, Sherrinford thought. And nonetheless they were the people whom you saw oftenest, did daily business with by visiphone (when a solar storm didn't make gibberish of their voices and chaos of their faces) or in the flesh, partied with, gossiped and intrigued with, intermarried with; in the end, they were the people who would bury you. The lights of the coastal towns were monstrously further away.

William Irons was a strong man. Yet when now he spoke, fear was in his tone. "You'd truly go over Troll Scarp?"

"Do you mean Hanstein Palisades?" Sherrinford responded, more challenge than question.

"No outwayer calls it anything but Troll Scarp," Barbro said.

And how had a name like that been reborn, light-years and centuries from Earth's Dark Ages?

"Hunters, trappers, prospectors—rangers, you call them—travel in those mountains," Sherrinford declared.

"In certain parts," Irons said. "That's allowed, by a pact once made 'tween a man and the Queen after he'd done well by a jack-o'-the-hill that a satan had hurt. Wherever the plumablanca grows, men may fare, if they leave man-goods on the altar boulders in payment for what they take out of the land. Elsewhere—" one fist clenched on a chair arm and went slack again—"'s not wise to go."

"It's been done, hasn't it?"

"Oh, yes. And some came back all right, or so they claimed, though I've heard they were never lucky afterward. And some didn't; they vanished. And some who returned babbled of wonders and horrors, and stayed witlings the rest of their lives. Not for a long time has anybody been rash enough to break the pact and overtread the bounds." Irons looked at Barbro almost entreatingly. His woman and children stared likewise, grown still. Wind hooted beyond the walls and rattled the storm shutters. "Don't you."

"I've reason to believe my son is there," she answered.

"Yes, yes, you've told and I'm

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sorry. Maybe something can be done. I don't know what, but I'd be glad to, oh, lay a double offering on Unvar's Barrow this midwinter, and a prayer drawn in the turf by a flint knife. Maybe they'll return him." Irons sighed. "They've not done such a thing in man's memory, though. And he could have a worse lot. I've glimpsed them myself, speeding madcap through twilight. They seem happier than we are. Might be no kindness, sending your boy home again."

"Like in the Arvid song," said his wife.

Irons nodded. "M-hm. Or others, come to thing of it."

"What's this?" Sherrinford asked. More sharply than before, he felt himself a stranger. He was a child of cities and technics, above all a child of the skeptical intelligence. This family *believed*. It was disquieting to see more than a touch of their acceptance in Barbro's slow nod.

"We have the same ballad in Olga Ivanoff Land," she told him, her voice less calm than the words. "It's one of the traditional ones—nobody knows who composed them—that are sung to set the measure of a ring-dance in a meadow."

"I noticed a multilyre in your baggage, Mrs. Cullen," said the wife of Irons. She was obviously eager to get off the explosive topic of a venture in defiance of the Old Folk. A songfest could help. "Would you like to entertain us?"

Barbro shook her head, white around the nostrils. The oldest boy said quickly, rather importantly, "Well, sure, I can, if our guests would like to hear."

"I'd enjoy that, thank you." Sherrinford leaned back in his seat and stoked his pipe. If this had not happened spontaneously, he would have guided the conversation toward a similar outcome.

In the past he had had no incentive to study the folklore of the outway, and not much chance to read the scanty references on it since Barbro brought him her trouble. Yet more and more he was becoming convinced that he must get an understanding—not an anthropological study, but a feel from the inside out—of the relationship between Roland's frontiersmen and those beings which haunted them.

A bustling followed, rearrangement, settling down to listen, coffee cups refilled and brandy offered on the side. The boy explained, "The last line is the chorus. Everybody join in, right?" Clearly he too hoped thus to bleed off some of the tension. Catharsis through music? Sherrinford wondered, and added to himself: No; exorcism.

A girl strummed a guitar. The boy sang, to a melody which beat across the storm noise:

"It was the ranger Arvid

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rode homeward through the hills
among the shadowy shiverleafs,
along the chiming rills.
The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"The night wind whispered around him
with scent of brok and rue.
Both moons rose high above him
and hills aflash with dew.
The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"And dreaming of that woman
who waited in the sun,
he stopped, amazed by starlight,
and so he was undone.
The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"For there beneath a barrow
that bulked athwart a moon,
the Outling folk were dancing
in glass and golden shoon.
The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"The Outling folk were dancing
like water, wind, and fire
to frosty-ringing harpstrings,
and never did they tire.
The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"To Arvid came she striding
from where she watched the dance,
the Queen of Air and Darkness,
with starlight in her glance.
The dance weaves under the firethorn.

"With starlight, love, and terror
in her immortal eye,
the Queen of Air and Darkness—"

"No!" Barbro leaped from her chair. Her fists were clenched and tears flogged her cheekbones. "You can't—pretend that—about the things that stole Jimmy!"

She fled from the chamber, upstairs to her guest bedroom.

But she finished the song herself. That was about seventy hours later, camped in the steeps where rangers dared not fare.

She and Sherrinford had not said much to the Irons family, after refusing repeated pleas to leave the forbidden country alone. Nor had they exchanged many remarks at first as they drove north. Slowly, however, he began to draw her out about her own life. After a while she almost forgot to mourn, in her remembering of home and old neighbors. Somehow this led to discoveries—that he, beneath his professorial manner, was a gourmet and a lover of opera and appreciated her femaleness; that she could still laugh and find beauty in the wild land around her—and she realized, half guiltily, that life held more hopes than even the recovery of the son Tim gave her.

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"I've convinced myself he's alive," the detective said. He scowled. "Frankly, it makes me regret having taken you along. I expected this would be only a fact-gathering trip, but it's turning out to be more. If we're dealing with real creatures who stole him, they can do real harm. I ought to turn back to the nearest garth and call for a plane to fetch you."

"Like bottommost hell you will, mister," she said. "You need somebody who knows outway conditions, and I'm a better shot than average."

"M-m-m . . . it would involve considerable delay too, wouldn't it? Besides the added distance, I can't put a signal through to any airport before this current burst of solar interference has calmed down."

Next "night" he broke out his remaining equipment and set it up. She recognized some of it, such as the thermal detector. Other items were strange to her, copied to his order from the advanced apparatus of his birthworld. He would tell her little about them. "I've explained my suspicion that the ones we're after have telepathic capabilities," he said in apology.

Her eyes widened. "You mean it could be true, the Queen and her people can read minds?"

"That's part of the dread which surrounds their legend, isn't it? Actually there's nothing spooky about the phenomenon. It was studied and fairly well defined centuries ago, on Earth. I daresay the facts are available in the scientific microfiles at Christmas Landing. You Rolanders have simply had no occasion to seek them out, any more than you've yet had occasion to look up how to build power beamcasters or spacecraft."

"Well, how does telepathy work, then?"

Sherrinford recognized that her query asked for comfort as much as it did for facts, and he spoke with deliberate dryness: "The organism generates extremely long-wave radiation which can, in principle, be modulated by the nervous system. In practice, the feebleness of the signals and their low rate of information transmission make them elusive, hard to detect and measure. Our prehuman ancestors went in for more reliable senses, like vision and hearing. What telepathic transceiving we do is marginal at best. But explorers have found extraterrestrial species that got an evolutionary advantage from developing the system further, in their particular environments. I imagine such species could include one which gets comparatively little direct sunlight—in fact, appears to hide from broad day. It could even become so able in this regard that, at short range, it can pick up man's weak emissions and make man's primi-

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tive sensitivities resonate to its own strong sendings."

"That would account for a lot, wouldn't it?" Barbro said faintly.

"I've now screened our car by a jamming field," Sherrinford told her, "but it reaches only a few meters past the chassis. Beyond, a scout of theirs might get a warning from your thoughts, if you knew precisely what I'm trying to do. I have a well-trained subconscious which sees to it that I think about this in French when I'm outside. Communication has to be structured to be intelligible, you see, and that's a different enough structure from English. But English is the only human language on Roland, and surely the Old Folk have learned it."

She nodded. He had told her his general plan, which was too obvious to conceal. The problem was to make contact with the aliens, if they existed. Hitherto, they had only revealed themselves, at rare intervals, to one or a few backwoodsmen at a time. An ability to generate hallucinations would help them in that. They would stay clear of any large, perhaps unmanageable expedition which might pass through their territory. But two people, braving all prohibitions, shouldn't look too formidable to approach. And . . . this would be the first human team which not only worked on the assumption that the Outlings were real but possessed the resources of modern, off-planet police technology.

Nothing happened at that camp. Sherrinford said he hadn't expected it would. The Old Folk seemed cautious this near to any settlement. In their own lands they must be bolder.

And by the following "night," the vehicle had gone well into yonder country. When Sherrinford stopped the engine in a meadow and the car settled down, silence rolled in like a wave.

They stepped out. She cooked a meal on the glower while he gathered wood, that they might later cheer themselves with a campfire. Frequently he glanced at his wrist. It bore no watch—instead, a radio-controlled dial, to tell what the instruments in the bus might register.

Who needed a watch here? Slow constellations wheeled beyond glimmering aurora. The moon Alde stood above a snowpeak, turning it argent, though this place lay at a goodly height. The rest of the mountains were hidden by the forest that crowded around. Its trees were mostly shiverleaf and feathery white plumablanca, ghostly amidst their shadows. A few firethorns glowed, clustered dim lanterns, and the underbrush was heavy and smelled sweet. You could see surprisingly far through the blue dusk. Somewhere nearby, a brook sang and a bird fluted.

"Lovely here," Sherrinford said.

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They had risen from their supper and not yet sat down again or kindled their fire.

"But strange," Barbro answered as low. "I wonder if it's really meant for us. If we can really hope to possess it."

His pipestem gestured at the stars. "Man's gone to stranger places than this."

"Has he? I . . . oh, I suppose it's just something left over from my outway childhood, but do you know, when I'm under them I can't think of the stars as balls of gas, whose energies have been measured, whose planets have been walked on by prosaic feet. No, they're small and cold and magical; our lives are bound to them; after we die, they whisper to us in our graves." Barbro glanced downward. "I realize that's nonsense."

She could see in the twilight how his face grew tight. "Not at all," he said. "Emotionally, physics may be a worse nonsense. And in the end, you know, after a sufficient number of generations, thought follows feeling. Man is not at heart rational. He could stop believing the stories of science if those no longer felt right."

He paused. "That ballad which didn't get finished in the house," he said, not looking at her. "Why did it affect you so?"

"I couldn't stand hearing *them*, well, praised. Or that's how it seemed. Sorry for the fuss."

"I gather the ballad is typical of a large class."

"Well, I never thought to add them up. Cultural anthropology is something we don't have time for on Roland, or more likely it hasn't occurred to us, with everything else there is to do. But—now you mention it, yes, I'm surprised at how many songs and stories have the Arvid motif in them."

"Could you bear to recite it?"

She mustered the will to laugh. "Why, I can do better than that if you want. Let me get my multilyre and I'll perform."

She omitted the hypnotic chorus line, though, when the notes rang out, except at the end. He watched her where she stood against moon and aurora.

"—the Queen of Air and Darkness
cried softly under sky:

"'Light down, you ranger Arvid,
and join the Outling folk.
You need no more be human,
which is a heavy yoke.'

"He dared to give her answer:
'I may do naught but run.
A maiden waits me, dreaming
in lands beneath the sun.

"'And likewise wait me comrades
and tasks I would not shirk,
for what is ranger Arvid
if he lays down his work?

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" 'So wreak your spells, you Outling,
and cast your wrath on me.
Though maybe you can slay me,
you'll not make me unfree.'

"The Queen of Air and Darkness
stood wrapped about with fear
and northlight-flares and beauty
he dared not look too near.

"Until she laughed like harpsong
and said to him in scorn:
'I do not need a magic
to make you always mourn.

" 'I send you home with nothing
except your memory
of moonlight, Outling music,
night breezes, dew, and me.

" 'And that will run behind you,
a shadow on the sun,
and that will lie beside you
when every day is done.

" 'In work and play and friendship
your grief will strike you dumb
for thinking what you are—and—
what you might have become.

" 'Your dull and foolish woman
treat kindly as you can.
Go home now, ranger Arvid,
set free to be a man!'

"In flickering and laughter
the Outling folk were gone.
He stood alone by moonlight
and wept until the dawn.
The dance weaves under the firethorn."

She laid the lyre aside. A wind rustled leaves. After a long quietness Sherrinford said, "And tales of this kind are part of everyone's life in the outway?"

"Well, you could put it thus," Barbro replied. "Though they're not all full of supernatural doings. Some are about love or heroism. Traditional themes."

"I don't think your particular tradition has arisen of itself." His tone was bleak. "In fact, I think many of your songs and stories were not composed by human beings."

He snapped his lips shut and would say no more on the subject. They went early to bed.

Hours later, an alarm roused them.

The buzzing was soft, but it brought them instantly alert. They slept in gripsuits, to be prepared for emergencies. Sky-glow lit them through the canopy. Sherrinford swung out of his bunk, slipped shoes on feet, and clipped gun holster to belt. "Stay inside," he commanded.

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"What's here?" Her pulse thuttered.

He squinted at the dials of his instruments and checked them against the luminous telltale on his wrist. "Three animals," he counted. "Not wild ones happening by. A large one, homeothermic, to judge from the infrared, holding still a short ways off. Another . . . hm, low temperature, diffuse and unstable emission, as if it were more like a . . . a swarm of cells coordinated somehow . . . pheromonally? . . . hovering, also at a distance. But the third's practically next to us, moving around in the brush; and that pattern looks human."

She saw him quiver with eagerness, no longer seeming a professor. "I'm going to try to make a capture," he said. "When we have a subject for interrogation—Stand ready to let me back in again fast. But don't risk yourself, whatever happens. And keep this cocked." He handed her a loaded big-game rifle.

His tall frame poised by the door, opened it a crack. Air blew in, cool, damp, full of fragrances and murmurings. The moon Oliver was now also aloft, the radiance of both unreally brilliant, and the aurora seethed in whiteness and ice-blue.

Sherrinford peered afresh at his telltale. It must indicate the directions of the watchers, among those dappled leaves. Abruptly he sprang out. He sprinted past the ashes of the campfire and vanished under trees. Barbro's hand strained on the butt of her weapon.

Racket exploded. Two in combat burst onto the meadow. Sherrinford had clapped a grip on a smaller human figure. She could make out by streaming silver and rainbow flicker that the other was nude, male, long haired, lithe, and young. He fought demoniacally, seeking to use teeth and feet and raking nails, and meanwhile he ululated like a satan.

The identification shot through her: A changeling, stolen in babyhood and raised by the Old Folk. This creature was what they would make Jimmy into.

"Ha!" Sherrinford forced his opponent around and drove stiffened fingers into the solar plexus. The boy gasped and sagged. Sherrinford manhandled him toward the car.

Out from the woods came a giant. It might itself have been a tree, black and rugose, bearing four great gnarly boughs; but earth quivered and boomed beneath its leg-roots, and its hoarse bellowing filled sky and skulls.

Barbro shrieked. Sherrinford whirled. He yanked out his pistol, fired and fired, flat whipcracks through the half-light. His free arm kept a lock on the youth. The troll shape lurched under those blows. It recovered and came on,

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more slowly, more carefully, circling around to cut him off from the bus. He couldn't move fast enough to evade it unless he released his prisoner—who was his sole possible guide to Jimmy—

Barbro leaped forth. "Don't!" Sherrinford shouted. "For God's sake, stay inside!" The monster rumbled and made snatching motions at her. She pulled the trigger. Recoil slammed her in the shoulder. The colossus rocked and fell. Somehow it got its feet back and lumbered toward her. She retreated. Again she shot, and again. The creature snarled. Blood began to drip from it and gleam oilily amidst dewdrops. It turned and went off, breaking branches, into the darkness that laired beneath the woods.

"Get to shelter!" Sherrinford yelled. "You're out of the jammer field!"

A mistiness drifted by overhead. She barely glimpsed it before she saw the new shape at the meadow edge. "Jimmy!" tore from her.

"Mother." He held out his arms. Moonlight coursed in his tears. She dropped her weapon and ran to him.

Sherrinford plunged in pursuit. Jimmy flitted away into the brush. Barbro crashed after, through clawing twigs. Then she was seized and borne away.

Standing over his captive, Sherrinford strengthened the fluoro output until vision of the wilderness was blocked off from within the bus. The boy squirmed beneath that colorless glare.

"You are going to talk," the man said. Despite the haggardness in his features, he spoke quietly.

The boy glared through tangled locks. A bruise was purpling on his jaw. He'd almost recovered ability to flee while Sherrinford chased and lost the woman. Returning, the detective had barely caught him. Time was lacking to be gentle, when Outling reinforcements might arrive at any moment. Sherrinford had knocked him out and dragged him inside. He sat lashed into a swivel seat.

He spat. "Talk to you, manclod?" But sweat stood on his skin, and his eyes flickered unceasingly around the metal which caged him.

"Give me a name to call you by."

"And have you work a spell on me?"

"Mine's Eric. If you don't give me another choice, I'll have to call you . . . m-m-m . . . Wuddikins."

"What?" However eldritch, the bound one remained a human adolescent. "Mistherd, then." The lilting accent of his English somehow emphasized its sullenness. "That's not the sound, only what it means. Anyway, it's my spoken name, naught else."

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"Ah, you keep a secret name you consider to be real?"

"She does. I don't know myself what it is. She knows the real names of everybody."

Sherrinford raised his brows. "She?"

"Who reigns. May she forgive me, I can't make the reverent sign when my arms are tied. Some invaders call her the Queen of Air and Darkness."

"So." Sherrinford got pipe and tobacco. He let silence wax while he started the fire. At length he said:

"I'll confess the Old Folk took me by surprise. I didn't expect so formidable a member of your gang. Everything I could learn had seemed to show they work on my race—and yours, lad—by stealth, trickery, and illusion."

Mistherd jerked a truculent nod. "She created the first nicors not long ago. Don't think she has naught but dazzlements at her beck."

"I don't. However, a steel-jacketed bullet works pretty well too, doesn't it?"

Sherrinford talked on, softly, mostly to himself: "I do still believe the, ah, nicors—all your half-humanlike breeds—are intended in the main to be seen, not used. The power of projecting mirages must surely be quite limited in range and scope as well as in the number of individuals who possess it. Otherwise she wouldn't have needed to work as slowly and craftily as she has. Even outside our mind-shield, Barbro—my companion—could have resisted, could have remained aware that whatever she saw was unreal . . . if she'd been less shaken, less frantic, less driven by need."

Sherrinford wreathed his head in smoke. "Never mind what I experienced," he said. "It couldn't have been the same as for her. I think the command was simply given us, 'You will see what you most desire in the world, running away from you into the forest.' Of course, she didn't travel many meters before the nicor waylaid her. I'd no hope of trailing them; I'm no Arctican woodsman, and besides, it'd have been too easy to ambush me. I came back to you." Grimly: "You're my link to your overlady."

"You think I'll guide you to Starhaven or Carheddin? Try making me, clod-man."

"I want to bargain."

"I s'pect you intend more'n that." Mistherd's answer held surprising shrewdness. "What'll you tell after you come home?"

"Yes, that does pose a problem, doesn't it? Barbro Cullen and I are not terrified outwayers. We're of the city. We brought recording instruments. We'd be the first of our kind to report an encounter with the Old Folk, and that report would be detailed and plausible. It would produce action."

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"So you see I'm not afraid to die," Mistherd declared, though his lips trembled a bit. "If I let you come in and do your man-things to my people, I'd have naught left worth living for."

"Have no immediate fears," Sherrinford said. "You're merely bait." He sat down and regarded the boy through a visor of calm. (Within, it wept in him: *Barbro, Barbro!*) "Consider. Your Queen can't very well let me go back, bringing my prisoner and telling about hers. She has to stop that somehow. I could try fighting my way through—this car is better armed than you know—but that wouldn't free anybody. Instead, I'm staying put. New forces of hers will get here as fast as they can. I assume they won't blindly throw themselves against a machine gun, a howitzer, a fulgurator. They'll parley first, whether their intentions are honest or not. Thus I make the contact I'm after."

"What d' you plan?" The mumble held anguish.

"First, this, as a sort of invitation." Sherrinford reached out to flick a switch. "There. I've lowered my shield against mind-reading and shape-casting. I daresay the leaders, at least, will be able to sense that it's gone. That should give them confidence."

"And next?"

"Next we wait. Would you like something to eat or drink?"

During the time which followed, Sherrinford tried to jolly Mistherd along, find out something of his life. What answers he got were curt. He dimmed the interior lights and settled down to peer outward. That was a long few hours.

They ended at a shout of gladness, half a sob, from the boy. Out of the woods came a band of the Old Folk.

Some of them stood forth more clearly than moons and stars and northlights should have caused. He in the van rode a white crown-buck whose horns were garlanded. His form was manlike but unearthly beautiful, silver-blond hair falling from beneath the antlered helmet, around the proud cold face. The cloak fluttered off his back like living wings. His frost-colored mail rang as he fared.

Behind him, to right and left, rode two who bore swords whereon small flames gleamed and flickered. Above, a flying flock laughed and trilled and tumbled in the breezes. Near them drifted a half-transparent mistiness. Those others who passed among trees after their chieftain were harder to make out. But they moved in quicksilver grace and as it were to a sound of harps and trumpets.

"Lord Luighaid." Glory overflowed in Mistherd's tone. "Her master Knower—himself."

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Sherrinford had never done a harder thing than to sit at the main control panel, finger near the button of the shield generator, and not touch it. He rolled down a section of canopy to let voices travel. A gust of wind struck him in the face, bearing odors of the roses in his mother's garden. At his back, in the main body of the vehicle, Mistherd strained against his bonds till he could see the oncoming troop.

"Call to them," Sherrinford said. "Ask if they will talk with me."

Unknown, flutingly sweet words flew back and forth. "Yes," the boy interpreted. "He will, the Lord Luighaid. But I can tell you, you'll never be let go. Don't fight them. Yield. Come away. You don't know what 'tis to be alive till you've dwelt in Carheddin under the mountain."

The Outlings drew nigh.

Jimmy glimmered and was gone. Barbro lay in strong arms, against a broad breast, and felt the horse move beneath her. It had to be a horse, though only a few were kept any longer on the steadings and they only for special uses or love. She could feel the rippling beneath its hide, hear a rush of parted leafage and the thud when a hoof struck stone; warmth and living scent welled up around her through the darkness.

He who carried her said mildly, "Don't be afraid, darling. It was a vision. But he's waiting for us and we're bound for him."

She was aware in a vague way that she ought to feel terror or despair or something. But her memories lay behind her—she wasn't sure just how she had come to be here—she was borne along in a knowledge of being loved. At peace, at peace, rest in the calm expectation of joy . . .

After a while the forest opened. They crossed a lea where boulders stood gray-white under the moons, their shadows shifting in the dim hues which the aurora threw across them. Flitteries danced, tiny comets, above the flowers between. Ahead gleamed a peak whose top was crowned in clouds.

Barbro's eyes happened to be turned forward. She saw the horse's head and thought, with quiet surprise: Why, this is Sambo, who was mine when I was a girl. She looked upward at the man. He wore a black tunic and a cowled cape, which made his face hard to see. She could not cry aloud, here. "Tim," she whispered.

"Yes, Barbro."

"I buried you—"

His smile was endlessly tender. "Did you think we're no more than what's laid back into the ground? Poor torn sweetheart. She who's called us is the All Healer. Now rest and dream."

"Dream," she said, and for a

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space she struggled to rouse herself. But the effort was weak. Why should she believe ashen tales about . . . atoms and energies, nothing else to fill a gape of emptiness . . . tales she could not bring to mind . . . when Tim and the horse her father gave her carried her on to Jimmy? Had the other thing not been the evil dream, and this her first drowsy awakening from it?

As if he heard her thoughts, he murmured, "They have a song in Outling lands. The Song of the Men:

"The world sails
to an unseen wind.
Light swirls by the bows.
The wake is night.

But the Dwellers have no such sadness."

"I don't understand," she said.

He nodded. "There's much you'll have to understand, darling, and I can't see you again until you've learned those truths. But meanwhile you'll be with our son."

She tried to lift her head and kiss him. He held her down. "Not yet," he said. "You've not been received among the Queen's people. I shouldn't have come for you, except that she was too merciful to forbid. Lie back, lie back."

Time blew past. The horse galloped tireless, never stumbling, up the mountain. Once she glimpsed a troop riding down it and thought they were bound for a last weird battle in the west against . . . who? . . . one who lay cased in iron and sorrow—Later she would ask herself the name of him who had brought her into the land of the Old Truth.

Finally spires lifted splendid among the stars, which are small and magical and whose whisperings comfort us after we are dead. They rode into a courtyard where candles burned unwavering, fountains splashed and birds sang. The air bore fragrance of brok and pericoup, of rue and roses, for not everything that man brought was horrible. The Dwellers waited in beauty to welcome her. Beyond their stateliness, pooks cavorted through the gloaming; among the trees darted children; merriment caroled across music more solemn.

"We have come—" Tim's voice was suddenly, inexplicably a croak. Barbro was not sure how he dismounted, bearing her. She stood before him and saw him sway on his feet.

Fear caught her. "Are you well?" She seized both his hands. They felt cold and rough. Where had Sambo gone? Her eyes searched beneath the cowl. In this brighter illumination, she ought to have seen her man's face clearly. But it was blurred, it kept changing. "What's wrong, oh, what's happened?"

He smiled. Was that the smile she had cherished? She couldn't

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completely remember. "I, I must go," he stammered, so low she could scarcely hear. "Our time is not ready." He drew free of her grasp and leaned on a robed form which had appeared at his side. A haziness swirled over both their heads. "Don't watch me go . . . back into the earth," he pleaded. "That's death for you. Till our time returns—There, our son!"

She had to fling her gaze around. Kneeling, she spread wide her arms. Jimmy struck her like a warm, solid cannonball. She rumpled his hair; she kissed the hollow of his neck; she laughed and wept and babbled foolishness; and this was no ghost, no memory that had stolen off when she wasn't looking. Now and again, as she turned her attention to yet another hurt which might have come upon him—hunger, sickness, fear—and found none, she would glimpse their surroundings. The gardens were gone. It didn't matter.

"I missed you so, Mother. Stay?"

"I'll take you home, dearest."

"Stay. Here's fun. I'll show. But you stay."

A sighing went through the twilight. Barbro rose. Jimmy clung to her hand. They confronted the Queen.

Very tall she was in her robes woven of northlights, and her starry crown and her garlands of kiss-me-never. Her countenance recalled Aphrodite of Milos, whose picture Barbro had often seen in the realms of men, save that the Queen's was more fair and more majesty dwelt upon it and in the night-blue eyes. Around her the gardens woke to new reality, the court of the Dwellers and the heaven-climbing spires.

"Be welcome," she spoke, her speaking a song, "forever."

Against the awe of her, Barbro said, "Moonmother, let us go home."

"That may not be."

"To our world, little and beloved," Barbro dreamed she begged, "which we build for ourselves and cherish for our children."

"To prison days, angry nights, works that crumble in the fingers, loves that turn to rot or stone or driftweed, loss, grief, and the only sureness that of the final nothingness. No. You too, Wanderfoot who is to be, will jubilate when the banners of the Outworld come flying into the last of the cities and man is made wholly alive. Now go with those who will teach you."

The Queen of Air and Darkness lifted an arm in summons. It halted, and none came to answer.

For over the fountains and melodies lifted a gruesome growling. Fires leaped, thunders crashed. Her hosts scattered screaming before the steel thing which boomed up the mountainside. The pooks were gone in a whirl of frightened

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wings. The nicors flung their bodies against the unalive invader and were consumed, until their Mother cried to them to retreat.

Barbro cast Jimmy down and herself over him. Towers wavered and smoked away. The mountain stood bare under icy moons, save for rocks, crags, and farther off a glacier in whose depths the auroral light pulsed blue. A cave mouth darkened a cliff. Thither folk streamed, seeking refuge underground. Some were human of blood, some grotesques like the pooks and nicors and wraiths; but most were lean, scaly, long-tailed, long-beaked, not remotely men or Outlings.

For an instant, even as Jimmy wailed at her breast—perhaps as much because the enchantment had been wrecked as because he was afraid—Barbro pitied the Queen who stood alone in her nakedness. Then that one also had fled, and Barbro's world shivered apart.

The guns fell silent; the vehicle whirred to a halt. From it sprang a boy who called wildly, "Shadow-of-a-Dream, where are you? It's me, Mistherd, oh, come, come!"—before he remembered that the language they had been raised in was not man's. He shouted in that until a girl crept out of a thicket where she had hidden. They stared at each other through dust, smoke, and moonglow. She ran to him.

A new voice barked from the car, "Barbro, hurry!"

Christmas Landing knew day: short at this time of year, but sunlight, blue skies, white clouds, glittering water, salt breezes in busy streets, and the sane disorder of Eric Sherrinford's living room.

He crossed and uncrossed his legs where he sat, puffed on his pipe as if to make a veil, and said, "Are you certain you're recovered? You mustn't risk overstrain."

"I'm fine," Barbro Cullen replied, though her tone was flat. "Still tired, yes, and showing it, no doubt. One doesn't go through such an experience and bounce back in a week. But I'm up and about. And to be frank, I must know what's happened, what's going on, before I can settle down to regain my full strength. Not a word of news anywhere."

"Have you spoken to others about the matter?"

"No. I've simply told visitors I was too exhausted to talk. Not much of a lie. I assumed there's a reason for censorship."

Sherrinford looked relieved. "Good girl. It's at my urging. You can imagine the sensation when this is made public. The authorities agreed they need time to study the facts, think and debate in a calm atmosphere, have a decent policy ready to offer voters who're bound to become rather hysterical at first." His mouth

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quirked slightly upward. "Furthermore, your nerves and Jimmy's get their chance to heal before the journalistic storm breaks over you. How is he?"

"Quite well. He continues pestering me for leave to go play with his friends in the Wonderful Place. But at his age, he'll recover—he'll forget."

"He may meet them later anyhow."

"What? We didn't—" Barbro shifted in her chair. "I've forgotten too. I hardly recall a thing from our last hours. Did you bring back any kidnaped humans?"

"No. The shock was savage as it was, without throwing them straight into an . . . an institution. Mistherd, who's basically a sensible young fellow, assured me they'd get along, at any rate as regards survival necessities, till arrangements can be made." Sherrinford hesitated. "I'm not sure what the arrangements will be. Nobody is, at our present stage. But obviously they include those people—or many of them, especially those who aren't full-grown—rejoining the human race. Though they may never feel at home in civilization. Perhaps in a way that's best, since we will need some kind of mutually acceptable liaison with the Dwellers."

His impersonality soothed them both. Barbro became able to say, "Was I too big a fool? I do remember how I yowled and beat my head on the floor."

"Why, no." He considered the big woman and her pride for a few seconds before he rose, walked over and laid a hand on her shoulder. "You'd been lured and trapped by a skillful play on your deepest instincts, at a moment of sheer nightmare. Afterward, as that wounded monster carried you off, evidently another type of being came along, one that could saturate you with close-range neuropsychic forces. On top of this, my arrival, the sudden brutal abolishment of every hallucination, must have been shattering. No wonder if you cried out in pain. Before you did, you competently got Jimmy and yourself into the bus, and you never interfered with me."

"What did you do?"

"Why, I drove off as fast as possible. After several hours, the atmospherics let up sufficiently for me to call Portolondon and insist on an emergency airlift. Not that that was vital. What chance had the enemy to stop us? They didn't even try.—But quick transportation was certainly helpful."

"I figured that's what must have gone on." Barbro caught his glance. "No, what I meant was, how did you find us in the backlands?"

Sherrinford moved a little off from her. "My prisoner was my guide. I don't think I actually

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killed any of the Dwellers who'd come to deal with me. I hope not. The car simply broke through them, after a couple of warning shots, and afterward outpaced them. Steel and fuel against flesh wasn't really fair. At the cave entrance, I did have to shoot down a few of those troll creatures. I'm not proud of it."

He stood silent. Presently: "But you were a captive," he said. "I couldn't be sure what they might do to you, who had first claim on me." After another pause: "I don't look for any more violence."

"How did you make . . . the boy . . . co-operate?"

Sherrinford paced from her, to the window, where he stood staring out at the Boreal Ocean. "I turned off the mind-shield," he said. "I let their band get close, in full splendor of illusion. Then I turned the shield back on, and we both saw them in their true shapes. As we went northward, I explained to Mistherd how he and his kind had been hoodwinked, used, made to live in a world that was never really there. I asked him if he wanted himself and whomever he cared about to go on till they died as domestic animals—yes, running in limited freedom on solid hills, but always called back to the dream-kennel." His pipe fumed furiously. "May I never see such bitterness again. He had been taught to believe he was free."

Quiet returned, above the hectic traffic. Charlemagne drew nearer to setting; already the east darkened.

Finally Barbro asked, "Do you know why?"

"Why children were taken and raised like that? Partly because it was in the pattern the Dwellers were creating; partly in order to study and experiment on members of our species—minds, that is, not bodies; partly because humans have special strengths which are helpful, like being able to endure full daylight."

"But what was the final purpose of it all?"

Sherrinford paced the floor. "Well," he said, "of course the ultimate motives of the aborigines are obscure. We can't do more than guess at how they think, let alone how they feel. But our ideas do seem to fit the data.

"Why did they hide from man? I suspect they, or rather their ancestors—for they aren't glittering elves, you know; they're mortal and fallible too—I suspect the natives were only being cautious at first, more cautious than human primitives, though certain of those on Earth were also slow to reveal themselves to strangers. Spying, mentally eavesdropping, Roland's Dwellers must have picked up enough language to get some idea of how different man was from them, and how powerful; and they gathered that more ships would be

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arriving, bringing settlers. It didn't occur to them that they might be conceded the right to keep their lands. Perhaps they're still more fiercely territorial than we. They determined to fight, in their own way. I daresay, once we begin to get insight into that mentality, our psychological science will go through its Copernican revolution."

Enthusiasm kindled in him. "That's not the sole thing we'll learn, either," he went on. "They must have science of their own, a nonhuman science born on a planet that isn't Earth. Because they did observe us as profoundly as we've ever observed ourselves; they did mount a plan against us, one that would have taken another century or more to complete. Well, what else do they know? How do they support their civilization without visible agriculture or aboveground buildings or mines or anything? How can they breed whole new intelligent species to order? A million questions, ten million answers!"

"*Can* we learn from them?" Barbro asked softly. "Or can we only overrun them as you say they fear?"

Sherrinford halted, leaned elbow on mantel, hugged his pipe and replied, "I hope we'll show more charity than that to a defeated enemy. It's what they are. They tried to conquer us, and failed, and now in a sense we are bound to conquer them, since they'll have to make their peace with the civilization of the machine rather than see it rust away as they strove for. Still, they never did us any harm as atrocious as what we've inflicted on our fellow men in the past. And, I repeat, they could teach us marvelous things; and we could teach them, too, once they've learned to be less intolerant of a different way of life."

"I suppose we can give them a reservation," she said, and didn't know why he grimaced and answered so roughly:

"Let's leave them the honor they've earned! They fought to save the world they'd always known from that—" he made a chopping gesture at the city—"and just possibly we'd be better off ourselves with less of it."

He sagged a trifle and sighed, "However, I suppose if Elfland had won, man on Roland would at last—peacefully, even happily—have died away. We live with our archetypes, but can we live in them?"

Barbro shook her head. "Sorry, I don't understand."

"What?" He looked at her in a surprise that drove out melancholy. After a laugh: "Stupid of me. I've explained this to so many politicians and scientists and commissioners and Lord knows what, these past days, I forgot I'd never explained to you. It was a rather

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vague idea of mine, most of the time we were traveling, and I don't like to discuss ideas prematurely. Now that we've met the Outlings and watched how they work, I do feel sure."

He tamped down his tobacco. "In limited measure," he said, "I've used an archetype throughout my own working life. The rational detective. It hasn't been a conscious pose—much—it's simply been an image which fitted my personality and professional style. But it draws an appropriate response from most people, whether or not they've ever heard of the original. The phenomenon is not uncommon. We meet persons who, in varying degrees, suggest Christ or Buddha or the Earth Mother or, say, on a less exalted plane, Hamlet or d'Artagnan. Historical, fictional, and mythical, such figures crystallize basic aspects of the human psyche, and when we meet them in our real experience, our reaction goes deeper than consciousness."

He grew grave again: "Man also creates archetypes that are not individuals. The Anima, the Shadow—and, it seems, the Outworld. The world of magic, of glamour—which originally meant enchantment—of half-human beings, some like Ariel and some like Caliban, but each free of mortal frailties and sorrows—therefore, perhaps, a little carelessly cruel, more than a little tricksy; dwellers in dusk and moonlight, not truly gods but obedient to rulers who are enigmatic and powerful enough to be—Yes, our Queen of Air and Darkness knew well what sights to let lonely people see, what illusions to spin around them from time to time, what songs and legends to set going among them. I wonder how much she and her underlings gleaned from human fairy tales, how much they made up themselves, and how much men created all over again, all unwittingly, as the sense of living on the edge of the world entered them."

Shadows stole across the room. It grew cooler and the traffic noises dwindled. Barbro asked mutedly, "But what could this do?"

"In many ways," Sherrinford answered, "the outwayer *is* back in the Dark Ages. He has few neighbors, hears scanty news from beyond his horizon, toils to survive in a land he only partly understands, that may any night raise unforeseeable disasters against him and is bounded by enormous wildernesses. The machine civilization which brought his ancestors here is frail at best. He could lose it as the Dark Ages nations had lost Greece and Rome, as the whole of Earth seems to have lost it. Let him be worked on, long, strongly, cunningly, by the archetypical Outworld, until he has come to believe in his

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bones that the magic of the Queen of Air and Darkness is greater than the energy of engines; and first his faith, finally his deeds will follow her. Oh, it wouldn't happen fast. Ideally, it would happen too slowly to be noticed, especially by self-satisfied city people. But when in the end a hinterland gone back to the ancient way turned from them, how could they keep alive?"

Barbro breathed, "She said to me, when their banners flew in the last of our cities, we would rejoice."

"I think we would have, by then," Sherrinford admitted. "Nevertheless, I believe in choosing one's destiny."

He shook himself, as if casting off a burden. He knocked the dottle from his pipe and stretched, muscle by muscle. "Well," he said, "it isn't going to happen."

She looked straight at him. "Thanks to you."

A flush went up his thin cheeks. "In time, I'm sure, somebody else would have—What matters is what we do next, and that's too big a decision for one individual or one generation to make."

She rose. "Unless the decision is personal, Eric," she suggested, feeling heat in her own face.

It was curious to see him shy. "I was hoping we might meet again."

"We will."

Ayoch sat on Wolund's Barrow. Aurora shuddered so brilliant, in such vast sheafs of light, as almost to hide the waning moons. Firethorn blooms had fallen; a few still glowed around the tree roots, amidst dry brok which crackled underfoot and smelled like woodsmoke. The air remained warm but no gleam was left on the sunset horizon.

"Farewell, fare lucky," the pook called. Mistherd and Shadow-of-a-Dream never looked back. It was as if they didn't dare. They trudged on out of sight, toward the human camp whose lights made a harsh new star in the south.

Ayoch lingered. He felt he should also offer good-by to her who had lately joined him that slept in the dolmen. Likely none would meet here again for loving or magic. But he could only think of one old verse that might do. He stood and trilled:

"Out of her breast
a blossom ascended.
The summer burned it.
The song is ended."

Then he spread his wings for the long flight away.

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Gordon Dickson and Poul Anderson have been friends since both were students at the University of Minnesota in the late forties, just about the same time that this magazine was being launched. In fact, several Dickson/Anderson collaborations (the "Hoka stories) were featured in early issues of F&SF. We feel fortunate that both men are still fairly regular contributors, and we're grateful to Gordon Dickson for this warm and personal portrait of Poul Anderson.

PROFILE: Poul Anderson

by Gordon R. Dickson

IN THE LATE NINETEEN FORties through nineteen fifty-one, Poul Anderson and I were living in the same rooming house in North Minneapolis. Our rooms were side by side with a single wall between them, and I did most of my writing in the late morning and afternoon. Poul did a great deal of his in the late afternoon and evening. Just about the time when I was slowing down, I would hear his typewriter, like mine earlier, beginning to chatter by bursts and pauses. But then, more quickly than mine had, his would pick up speed; and I would soon hear it rattling along steadily just as I—by this time empty of energy and ingenuity alike—was drowsing off on the bed where I had lain down.

I would wake sometime later to find night dark beyond the unpulled shades of the windows of my room; and, if Poul's typewriter was still sounding, I would get up, eat something, and perhaps go out by myself for a drink. Or, if his typewriter was now silent, I would go and knock on his door; and perhaps we would both go out. That is how it was in those days.

Relating it like that now makes it sound like a very attractive and uncomplex sort of life. But if I stop to remember it in detail, I have to admit that the attractiveness and lack of complexity were only part of the story. The lives of authors, like authors themselves, are invariably a good deal more complicated than they, or even their writings, indicate. And there

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is a particular appropriateness in this. For when, as in Poul's case, you have an author whose work itself is a good deal more complex than its surface appearance indicates, the order of difference between work and man begins to extend itself out of reach of easy explanation. T. S. Eliot once noted in an introduction to an edition of the poems of Rudyard Kipling that most poets have to be protected from charges of obscurity in their work. But in the case of Kipling, he added, it was necessary to defend the man against the charge of writing jingles. Of course, poems of Rudyard Kipling are very definitely not jingles, although too much of their allegory and meaning is often hidden in the nineteenth century political situations upon which Kipling commented and criticized. Yet the very musicality of the rhymes and rhythms he used makes them read with a deceptive easiness as if they had been tossed off for the sound of their words alone. Similarly, the narrative art of Poul Anderson is not, and never was a simple one, although the sheer readability and entertainment of it can make it seem so.

Back when I lived in that same rooming house as Poul, we were both still students at the University of Minnesota, and Poul had no intention of being a full-time writer. He was after a degree in physics, which he in fact gained, with distinction, in June, 1948. However, by then he was already writing and selling well; and so, when he did graduate, he delayed going after a job in physics in favor of supporting himself for a while by writing. That 'while' as Poul himself now says, seems to have stretched out to a lifetime, to the great pleasure of the rest of us, of course. Poul being Poul, he would undoubtedly have been writing some science fiction, fantasy, historical or detective fiction—and nonfiction as well—no matter how busy an ordinary job might keep him. But it would be too much to expect, even of him, that he would have produced so much so well in the years since 1948 as he has without other occupation to distract him. The tally of his published work stands now at thirty-four novels, plus fifteen collections of his shorter works, three books of nonfiction, and two books he has edited. All this, not counting the work he has in hand and under contract or the legion of his published short stories.

He has, as everyone knows, a talent for titles. To read these, where they have escaped changing by editor or publisher, is to pick up some of the intense note of poetry that runs through all his writing. Among the novels—*We Have Fed Our Sea* (from the line of the Kipling poem), *The High Crusade, Three Hearts and Three Lions, Tau Zero* . . . and among

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the shorter fiction, "Sam Hall," "Call Me Joe," "Starfog," "Kyrie," "No Truce With Kings" . . . titles like these, given half a chance, almost weave themselves into a ballad or a coronach. While at the same time there runs under their melody the strong control of the scientifically educated mind that gives Anderson's writing its point and purpose.

As A. J. Budrys has said recently—"The single man best qualified to analyze the classics—" he is speaking here of the classics of science fiction—"would be Poul Anderson. Thank a good Lord he spends his time doing so only for the purpose of constructing additional fiction . . ." *

And indeed, someone should be thanked. Because the Anderson story is a unique and valuable production, and there is only one source for it in the known universe, the man himself, who has been unique and valuable from the beginning.

He was born in Pennsylvania, of Scandinavian parents, on November 25, 1926, hence the spelling of his first name. The proper pronunciation of that name falls somewhere between "pole" and "powl" for tongues accustomed to American English, but Poul, in fact, answers to all pronunciations of it. He was still a baby when his father was transferred to Port Arthur, Texas. There, the family spent the next eleven years, and Poul's brother John was born (the same John Anderson who later led the first expedition into the Heritage Mountains of Antarctica).

The death of his father at the end of that eleven years moved the family to Denmark for a while, where there were a great many maternal relatives and friends. The approach of World War II, however, caused the boys' mother to bring them back to the United States, where for a while she worked for the Danish Legation in Washington. The next move was to a farm in Minnesota, from which Poul came to Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota, in the nineteen forties.

There was a very loose organization at that time in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, known as the MFS. Before the war it had been a science fiction fan organization called the Minneapolis Fantasy Society, with writers like Cliff Simak, Carl Jacobi, Donald Wandrei, Oliver Saari, and others on its membership lists. After the war, although it retained its connection with science fiction generally and all its original members still in the city remained part of it, it developed into an essentially unstructured social group with interests ranging from manuscript criticism to softball, with a great deal of drinking and talking along the way.

*Galaxy *December, 1970—"Galaxy Bookshelf."*

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I, myself, had been a member of the original group before the war when the various armed services split us up and sent us all in different directions. Poul joined the MFS after the war. It was one of the criteria of the group then that you had to be able to do whatever was necessary in the ordinary way of your affairs and still be able to sit up until midnight or later, socializing. Poul was no exception. At the time that he and the MFS got together, he was majoring in physics, minoring in chemistry and mathematics—and I believe I mentioned that in 1948 he graduated with honors. That fact against the backdrop of the MFS in those days gives some idea of his capabilities.

It also gives some sort of index by which to judge the scientific part of his nature, and this is important because it is the strong blend of science and poetry in Poul's writing which marks its uniqueness in a field where neither science nor poetry separately have ever been in short supply. Both showed strongly in Poul in those days. One among the rather large number of MFS activities after the war was a great deal of singing, usually done late at night at one of our impromptu gatherings. What were sung were mostly ballads, but in a number of languages, ranging from modern English through Swedish, Norwegian, German, French, Polish, Middle English, Old Danish, and others now forgotten. For many of the non-English ballads we were indebted to Poul. Not only that. There was also a good deal of setting of poems to music, and writing of lyrics, some writing of melodies, and—on Poul's part—a good deal of excellent translation of Scandinavian poets like Johannes V. Jensen.

This intermingled with another recreation, which was the verbal building of science fiction stories. Over the table an idea for a story would be produced and tossed from person to person, so to speak, being added to and shaped as it went until it developed into something that might or might not get written, but which was already a good way along the path to standing on its own narrative legs. Sitting in on one of these story-making moments, it was possible to see in Poul's contributions how saga and song, known science and hypothetical science complemented each other, working all together to come up as action clothed in the perfect armor of possibility. It is a rare talent, to mix such different materials so effectively; but Poul showed it invariably and successfully whenever he became involved in the story-building game.

Time, however, was shifting the scenery behind us all, even then. With the early fifties, the social group began to splinter and spread apart, just as the prewar

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MFS had been broken up and spread around by the services. In 1953, Poul married Karen, an author of fiction and poetry in her own right,* as the readers of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* know; and they moved to the Bay Area of San Francisco, ending up with their daughter Astrid in their present home in Orinda, California, over the mountains from the Bay, out of the fog and into the sunshine. But the move to the West Coast agreed with Poul. He became a more active producer of fiction than ever.

From *Brain Wave* on, most of his most memorable writing has been done in the Bay Area locations. His Hugo winners—"The Longest Voyage," "No Truce With Kings," and the latest, "The Sharing of Flesh"—all originated there. So did a host of his other well-remembered shorter stories—the classic "The Man Who Came Early," all the other stories I mentioned earlier when I was talking about the poetry of his titles, as well as "The Martian Crown Jewels," "The Sky People," "Kings Who Die," "Escape From Orbit" . . . and among the novels—his fine early fantasy *The Broken Sword,* recently rescued from out-of-printness and reissued in a revised version in paperback by Ballantine, and a number of favorites like *The Star Ways, War of the Wing-Men, We Claim These Stars, Shield, The Corridors of Time, The Star Fox* . . . The list goes on. Then, too, there are the Time Patrol stories; the stories about Van Rijn, Falkayn and the Polesotechnic League; and the Flandry series—as well as the F&SF fantasy series of which the last was "Operation Changeling." This last series, by the way, is due in novel form from Doubleday under the title *Operation Chaos.*

With all this, Poul still finds time to do a dozen other things. He travels, he builds houseboats, he sails, climbs mountains and finds time to belong to a host of organizations. He is a member of Mystery Writers of America, having been both vice-president and regional secretary in his time. He also belongs to the local chapter of the Baker Street Irregulars, where he has the investiture of The Dreadful Abernetty Business; to S.A.G.A. (Swordsmen and Sorcerers Guild of America, Ltd.); and of course to Science Fiction Writers of America, whose West Coast Regional Conference is Poul's invention.

And then there is The Society For Creative Anachronism, in which he has won a knighthood. He goes under the name Béla of Eastmarch, with coat of arms azure, two suns or in pale, a saltire argent, the devising of which owes its debt to Karen, who is a member of the College of Heralds of the Kingdom of the Mists.

*e.g. see page 63. Ed.

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Meanwhile, on the wider stages of the world, this tall, powerfully minded and gentle man remains deeply concerned in the struggle to improve the lot of his fellow writers, and in the ecology and conservation movement, where he was active long before these things caught public attention. In modern politics, he is that unusual figure, an eighteenth century liberal. In religion he stands self-accused as a devout scientist; and in pride, a centrist upon his family.

"The way things are shaping up," he says, "my chief claim to fame will probably be that I fathered Astrid."

This may be. But it is necessary to take him with more than a grain of salt when he goes on to say that he is, in writing, "an old-fashioned teller of tales."

He is that, indeed. But the inferable understatement involved is somewhat galloping. Just "a teller of tales" does not do him justice. We who read him know better.

ABOUT THE COVER

Kelly Freas has done his usual marvelous job of visualization. Going from the upper left widdershins — naturally — we first see the interstellar merchant prince Nicholas van Rijn, from such books as TRADER TO THE STARS and SATAN'S WORLD. In front of the space armor stands Captain Sir Dominic Flandry, intelligence officer of Imperial Terra; one of the stories about him, "The Game of Glory," was in *Venture* some years ago. Then Steve Matuchek poses in front of his red-haired wife Ginny and behind her black business associate Svartalf, while to the rear of this group stands a shadowy figure that may be one of their demonic opponents; these, of course, are from F&SF's "Operation" series. At lower right, from front to rear, are the trader team partners Chee Lan, Adzel, and David Falkayn, who work for van Rijn but have a book of their own, THE TROUBLE TWISTERS. And the man at far middle right is Holger Danske from THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS, a short version of which was originally in F&SF.

A limited number of full-color proofs (without overprinting) of this special cover are available. Send $1.00 for each to: Mercury Press, Inc., Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

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For this article on the writings of Poul Anderson, we've called upon F&SF's Book Review Editor, James Blish, who is probably science fiction's most scrupulous and respected critic. A new collection of critical essays by Mr. Blish (writing as William Atheling, Jr.) has just been published under the title MORE ISSUES AT HAND. *(Available from Advent, Box 9228, Chicago 60690, $5.00.)*

POUL ANDERSON: The Enduring Explosion

by James Blish

SOME STATISTICS FIRST.

Poul Anderson made his first appearance in a science fiction magazine as an author in 1944, and in the Day Index (which reaches only through 1950) he has 17 listings. In the four NESFA Indices which I own (1951-1968), there are 210 more, plus 10 as "Winston P. Sanders" and one as "A. A. Craig." This comes to 238 pieces—many of them novels—in 25 years. This may be a record; its only close competitor is that of Robert Silverberg, who rolled up 190 listings (plus 19 as "Robert Randall") over a considerably shorter period. It certainly compares well with the record of that proverbial demon of prolificness, Henry Kuttner, whose lifetime science fiction output came to 170 titles. (All three men, of course, also wrote outside our field, and I haven't made any attempt to take this output into account.)

After the counting is over, there remains the question of quality, and here the Anderson record is unique. There may be a few poor stories among those 238-plus, but they would be hard to find, and I am not about to point any out here, either.

It's my opinion, which I suspect is widely shared, that Anderson is the only surviving writer of the Golden Age of *Astounding* who is still writing sf whose work has not gone steadily (or jerkily) down-

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hill. But even this is a negative way of putting the matter. The positive side is that Poul Anderson the scientist, the technician, the stylist, the bard, the humanist and the humorist—a nonexhaustive list—is completely immune to any changes in fashion. He is, in short, an artist.

Once upon a time, I made an unfortunate attempt to label the kind of thing Poul writes as "hard copy"—work so deeply felt and so carefully crafted that it looks solid no matter from what angle you view it—and I asked for more of the same from other people. Everyone instantly assumed that what I was talking about was sf in which the science was correct, and thus inadvertently was born our present usage of "hard science fiction."

Well, Anderson writes hard science fiction in this sense as well. He has a degree in physics, and he uses the knowledge; the scientific and technological underpinnings of his sf are thoroughly worked out in advance and are as accurate as the present state of knowledge permits. No innocent is ever going to come away from an Anderson story believing that an electron is a little planet or that "forces" come in "orders" or that there is a steaming jungle on Vesta. Work of this kind is becoming increasingly rare and deserves all the praise we can give it.

As a literary craftsman he is, as was Kuttner, a born technician, whose gifts in this area were refined back in the days when the one thing the pulp magazines absolutely demanded of a writer was that he know how to plot. In general, he is not as flamboyant about his mastery of structure as was Kuttner (who once confessed to me a temptation to write a story entirely in footnotes, a trick to be turned much later by Vladimir Nabokov in *Pale Fire*); most of his work is simply unobtrusively well made. When he does show off, however, the results are sufficiently spectacular to make fellow practitioners turn white with envy. Consider, for example, *The Day after Doomsday*. What other writer would have the temerity to build the reader up for scores of pages toward a crucial space battle—and then attempt to tell it in terms of a ballad written many years after the event?

Not only does he attempt it, but he brings it off, which leads us naturally to Anderson the bard. He retains a deep and indeed scholarly interest in his Scandinavian ancestry, and it shows, usually to advantage. When he wants to give a story an epic quality, he starts an immense step ahead of the rest of us: he thinks of (or feels like) the *Elder Edda* instead of *The Skylark of Valeron*.

To be a bard is not necessarily the same thing as being a poet, but Anderson is both. Even the clichés

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on sundials ("It is later than you think") in his hands become living metaphors ("Time is the bridge that burns behind us"). Here is another case: An Anderson hero is contemplating an apparently placid society which seems to work well only because the people have no deep emotions, and he wonders how they would react if confronted with something like *King Lear*—or with a real tragedy, such as that of the man who "broke his regimental oath, and gave up wealth and honors and the mistress he loved more than the sun, to go and tend his mad wife in a hut upon the heath." (I deliberately quote this from memory; I haven't thought of that line since 1963, but I'll bet I don't have it far wrong all the same.) Of course the "real" tragedy is as invented as is *King Lear,* but I at least instantly felt that the bare bones of the one would not have been unworthy of the language of the other. Here the bard and the poet are united.

The sense of tragedy is also extremely rare in science fiction. To Poul Anderson it is a living entity. For him, it does not inhere in such commonplaces as the losses of old age, the deaths of lovers, the slaughters of war or Nature; as a physicist, he knows that the entropy gradient goes inexorably in only one direction, and he wastes no time sniveling about it. For Anderson, the tragic hero is a man like the one whose saga I have quasi-quoted above: the man who is driven partly by circumstance, but mostly by his own conscience, to do the wrong thing for the right reason—and then has to live with the consequences. A fully fleshed-out example is *Sister Planet,* in which the hero, foreseeing that a friendly alien race whom he loves are going to be ruthlessly exploited by man, bombs their Holy Place to teach them eternal suspicion. His exit line is: *Oh God, please exist. Please make a hell for me.* And in a way, the prayer is answered, for when the man's body is found much later, he is carrying a Bible in which Ezekiel 7:3,4 are marked. Look it up.

I have never reread that story; it tore me to pieces the first time, and that was enough. But I am the richer for it. And I can only stand in awe of a man who could not only entertain the insight, but write it out. It is utterly pitiless, as genuine tragedy must be; very few writers, and almost no sf writers, know the difference.

The other side of that shield is comedy, and Anderson has written a lot of that, too. Most readers probably remember *The High Crusade,* in which a medieval army is carried off in a spaceship and winds up laying successful siege to a culture about ten centuries in advance of it technologically. I am not so fond of

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the "Hoka" stories Poul wrote with Gordon R. Dickson, but nothing can dim my affection for *A Bicycle Built for Brew,* in which Anderson constructed a spaceship powered by beer and made me believe it would actually work.

Very few Anderson stories are solely adventure, gimmickry, tragedy, or any other single thing. They are wholes, and this is the source of his endurance. And it is mostly self-conscious and deliberate (the exceptions are the ideas, which come to him, as to all of us, from we wish we knew where). He has noted rather frequently, for instance, that in each scene he makes it a policy to appeal to at least three senses, to increase the reader's feeling that he is actually *there.* But though this is good policy, it is also only an indicative technicality. The real wholeness goes much deeper.

At the Detention (the 17th World Science Fiction Convention, Detroit, 1959), where he was Guest of Honor, he made an appeal for what he called a "unitary" approach to science fiction, in which philosophy, love, technology, poetry, and the minutiae of daily living would all play parts concomitant with their importance in real life, but heightened by the insight of the writer. You will note, I think, that this is more than just a prescription for good science fiction. It is a prescription for good fiction of any kind.

And Poul Anderson is his own best example of it.

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POUL ANDERSON: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Except for serializations of works later published in book form, this chronological bibliography lists only original appearances, omitting reprints, anthologizations, translations, etc. With one or two exceptions, it also confines itself to commercially published material, leaving out letters, contest entries, and the like. Where the author's title was changed, the original is given in brackets. Serial titles, where different from those of a book, are given in parentheses, as are notations on significant differences between versions, on collaborators, and on pseudonyms.

Abbreviations: Amz, Amazing Stories; ASF, Astounding Science Fiction, later Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact; DSF, Dynamic Science Fiction; EQMM, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine; Fan, Fantastic; F&SF, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction; FcwSFS, Future Combined With Science Fiction Stories; FSQ, Fantastic Stories Quarterly; FU, Fantastic Universe; Gal, Galaxy; OW, Other Worlds; PS, Planet Stories; SDM, The Saint Detective Magazine; SFQ, Science Fiction Quarterly; SSS, Super Science Stories; VSF, Venture Science Fiction.

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1948

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1949

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1950

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1951

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1952

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1957

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1959

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1960

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1961

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1962

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1963

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1964

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1965

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1966

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1967

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1968

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1969

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1970

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NOTES

Forthcoming as of this writing are the novels *The Byworlder* (New American Library), *The Dancer from Atlantis* (New American Library), and *Operation Chaos* (Doubleday—a unification of the "Operation" series); the essay "More Futures Than One" (Playboy); the short stories "The Spoilers" (Boys' Life), "Murphy's Hall" (with Karen Anderson—in the

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Infinity series), and "I Tell You, It's True" (in an as yet untitled collection, Harry Harrison, ed.); the novelette "The Merman's Children" (in an as yet untitled collection, Lin Carter, ed.); and, of course, the story in the present issue of F&SF.

Bibliographies more detailed than this have been compiled by Roger G. Peyton (*A Checklist of Poul Anderson,* Birmingham, England, 1965), Mark Owings (in *Washington Science Fiction Association Journal* #69, Washington, D.C., 1970), and Capt. Terry N. Taylor. See also the various magazine and book indexes.

THE UNICORN TRADE

They graze at night, the unicorns, upon the fresh-dewed grasses,
Molten starlight flying as they toss their sapphire horns,
They step with light and dainty hoof below the stony passes,
Shimmer under shadow where the nightingale mourns.
The bright manes ripple over dapple flanks,
Quarter-moon racing past cloudy banks—
Now on the warning wind of dawn they flee night's crimson death;
They sleep in velvet forest shade; they spice it with their breath.
The castle queens it on her hill, the crown of pride and power,
Turreted and traceried and carven like a gem,
With sunny court and golden hall, with wall and lordly tower
Rich-tapestried with vine and grape, with rose on thorny stem;
Rubies, damask, pomanders and swords—
Wild loves, black hates, delights of wine and words—
Let pipe and tabor play! and thus, hand resting light on hand,
With quicker-beating heart we'll foot the skipping allemande.

There's goodly trade in unicorns, in castles and their treasure,
Dragons are much demanded, endless caverns, eagly crags,
There's trade in rings of elven work, in songs of striding measure,
Star-smiting curses, aye, and quests, and splendid thumping brags.
Come buy! Come choose your heart's desire of these,
Fable and dream, wondrous commodities.
Already yours, these unicorns, as aught you owned yestre'en,
This castle, real as memory, that none but you have seen.

—KAREN ANDERSON

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BOOKS

MOVIES DON'T BELONG IN A book review, but Baird Searles (our new film reviewer) will probably never have a chance to see Richard Lester's fine science fiction film, *The Bed Sitting Room*, and I want to call readers' attention to it. The film was released some time ago and seems to have died so quietly that no one I know even heard about it. I saw it last summer only by accident.

The Bed Sitting Room (we would say "one-room apartment") is a familiar story of England ravaged by the Bomb, but the world of the film has suffered a weird shift into the ultraviolet, so that the familiar incidents one would expect are represented not by themselves, but by absurdities that are only half metaphorical. Plague? Sir Ralph Richardson not only fears that he will turn into a bed-sitting room, but actually does so (in an unfashionable part of London). There are the young lovers—Rita Tushingham, seventeen months pregnant, who announces herself as "Penelope, the celebrated fiancée," and complains to her lover, Alan, that they really ought not to eat Dad, who has been metamorphosed first into an intelligent parrot and then into a barbecued chicken. The perversion (a gentleman who has spent a decade in a bomb shelter after shooting his wife and mother-in-law as they tried to get in) is of a kind that would astonish Krafft-Ebing. In a very British clinging to business-as-usual, a Mrs. Ethel Noakes (the nearest to the Throne) has become Queen; at the end of the film everyone sings:

God save Mrs. Ethel Noakes,
God save Mrs. Ethel Noakes,
God save Mrs. Ethelnoakes.

(Then they add her address.) Mrs. Noakes appears, royally dressed and mounted on a horse under an arch made of junked refrigerators; radiation is declared unnecessary and despair un-British; the sky turns blue, the grass springs up, Penelope's monster-baby turns to a real baby; and it is declared that everything is now hotsy-totsy. My favorite is the young man who appears in a dirigible (it's weighted by the dangling chassis of a Volvo) and announces: "Times of crisis and social instability often produce new leaders. Here I am, so watch it."

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The audience I was with (like the critics, apparently) could not make up its mind whether *The Bed Sitting Room* was a Laff Riot or a Stark Drama; it is, of course, neither. The film moves slowly, almost pastorally, amid the eerie beauty of an industrial ash-heap: mountain ranges of shoes, valleys of bright yellow or vermilion mud, deserts of trash, the rusty skeleton of an old car-wash at which men congregate, drinking the dirty water as if the place were a bar. It is absurd, sad, surrealistically beautiful, and very, very frightening. It is the Goon Show gone sad. (There are many Goon Show actors in evidence.) A straight story of atomic devastation would not affect us by now, but this weird, skewed collection of absurdities goes right to the heart. I think the original commercial failure of the film was due to people's (and critics') not picking up the science fiction cues (which are obvious to anybody in the field) and so not knowing how to take the film. Will the Kindly Editor forward this column to whoever owns the rights to *The Bed Sitting Room? Publicized as science fiction* (to a college audience for starters), the movie would attract the audience it needs. You might very well have a commercial success on your hands. The film is already an artistic success.

In my last column I noted that writers new to science fiction often produce Godawful books. Luckily movie directors new to the field, like Richard Lester, often produce films as good as *The Bed Sitting Room.*

Anthologies seem to be growing introductions lately, clone-fashion; the worse the stories, the longer (and more burbly) the introductions. This is called "padding." Doubleday's FIRST FLIGHTS TO THE MOON (edited by Hal Clement) is an extremely slight collection of reprints eked out by an awful lot of commentary. Except for Larry Niven's fine "Wrong Way Street" and Mr. Clement's comment on A. Bertram Chandler's "Critical Angle," FIRST FLIGHTS TO THE MOON is nothing but an exploitation of the moon shot. It simply should not have been done.

Harry Harrison's SF: AUTHOR'S CHOICE 2 (Berkley, 75¢) also suffers from fat-between-the-stories. It may be interesting to fans or other authors to see what sf writers pick as their own favorite tales, but the result is an uneven collection. More than that, it is an encouragement to silly self-indulgence; people ought to be interested in our work, not in us. I too am pathetically grateful for the chance to peek out from behind the typewriter, but unless the introductions are little stories in themselves (as in Harlan Ellison's

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DANGEROUS VISIONS) there is really no excuse for them. The stories—bad as some of them are—are better than the authors' comments on their typewriters, their wallpaper, the fact that they are modestly proud of the story, the fact that it isn't well-known, or their clichés about writing, criticism, the unconscious, and the Creative Process.

To stick to the stories: the collection is a mixed, uneven, moderately interesting grab-bag, second-rate (and mostly second-hand), but readable. There are four good stories in it: Alfred Bester's "Fondly Fahrenheit," Robert Silverberg's "To See the Invisible Man," Brian Aldiss's "Auto-Ancestral Fracture," and Hal Clement's "Proof." Mr. Clement's story is a triumph of sheer conception over naiveté (it was first published in 1942), and Mr. Aldiss's is a mannered, pretentious, "literary" tale of the Acid-Head War. Much of the static description in "Fracture" is really fine—e.g., the moviemaker's swimming pool overgrown with water hyacinth—but Mr. Aldiss does not seem able to handle action in this way, and there are poems scattered through the tale that, even in context, are just plain awful. Writers ought not to indulge themselves by smuggling bad verse into their stories; take your chances with the little magazines like a man.

Harry Harrison's ONE STEP FROM EARTH (Macmillan, $5.95) is a collection of nine stories bound together loosely (and not altogether truthfully) by the idea of matter transmission. There is another hypertrophied introduction, hypertrophied in this case because it has nothing to do with the stories; in fact, the matter transmitter described in the introduction is of the kind used in only one of the nine. Two of the tales don't really need matter transmission at all. The stories are routine, unoriginal, mildly interesting, and readable.

Robert Silverberg's THE CUBE ROOT OF UNCERTAINTY (Macmillan, $5.95) is a collection of twelve stories: six Old Silverberg (before 1967) and six New Silverberg. Old Silverberg is an idiot ("But it takes all sorts to make a continuum," he philosophically decided), but New Silverberg is something else: a highly colored, gloomy, melodramatic, morally allegorical writer who luxuriates in lush description and has a real love of calamity. Six such tales are not worth the price of the hardcover book, but the paperback will probably be out soon. I find myself in real trouble in evaluating New Silverberg. I don't like his feverishness or his intense, mad romanticism, and I suspect Mr. Silverberg (as Old Silverberg, the extremely self-conscious and

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clever hack) needs some time to get out of his system all the sophomoric dark doom that most of us—far less technically expert—dealt with during our apprenticeships. The book contains the famous "Passengers," "To the Dark Star," "Neighbor," and "Halfway House." "Sundance," the best of the lot, achieves a playing with reality that is often aimed at in science fiction but seldom realized. Mr. Silverberg gets better and better. His recent serial in *Galaxy*, DOWNWARD TO THE EARTH, is a genuine novel that needs no apologies (except perhaps for the very end—why are science fiction writers so obsessed with turning into the Messiah?). The future seems bright for an author who can write in his Introduction (excusable because it's funny, the first use I have seen Mr. Silverberg make in print of his really extraordinary wit): "The newspapers teem with the horrors that smite us: the swerving auto, the collapsing bridge, the ptomaine in the vichyssoise, the fishhook in the filet of sole . . . But . . . the gorgeous worst is yet to come."

How is one to criticize a book written by two authors? Two minds were involved in the creation of TIME ROGUE by Leo P. Kelley (Lancer, 75¢). Both may have been the author's, for all I know, but whoever created the extraordinarily good characters in this book cannot possibly have created the truly idiotic frame of the plot, nor can the writer whose characters talk real, living, modern American (a rarity in science fiction) have written the following account of a black revolutionary's disillusionment:

He witnessed with sadness the fact that corruption was common to men of every color. The leaders of the revolution he had helped to create—those who came after his own death—still called for equality of all but practiced a subtle inequality that favored only themselves. Monies intended for the relief of distress, whose names were hunger and want, found their way to steel vaults in foreign countries while obsequious accountants hired by the revolutionary leaders wrote false figures on command into impressive audit reports. (p. 144)

Such are the thoughts of the character who has previously spoken like this:

"And black, I say brothers, is where it's at! *Black*! Do you know what black means? It means beauty. It means we are a people of color and I would remind you all that most of the peoples of this world are also people of color." (p. 46)

Mind One is responsible for a wonderful child chess-genius named Barry, who daydreams that he'd like to be "a real King and have a castle and ladies-in-waiting all over his court and hey, a jester! He'd have a jester with a three-pronged cap with bells on the ends that jingled when he hopped

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about and told dirty stories to make everybody laugh." (p. 31) Barry also informs the company at one point that he knows worse words than "ass."

"*Hooee*!" Barry cried, grinning. "I've heard a lot worse. I've used worse words myself too. I could use words that would stand your hair on end." (p. 79)

I am also inexpressibly grateful to Mind One for providing a middle-aged lady scientist who is neither a castrating bitch nor an obsessively frustrated virgin, but a real woman whose love and guilt for a long-dead sister (killed in a concentration camp) is the mainspring of her character.

Mind Two writes like this:

When they were all on their feet and facing the Sergeant, they began to realize with immense relief that Caleb had at last forsaken them. They knew that the mechanism that had been Leda has been returned to the time from which she had come and they were aware that the murder the Sergeant had come to investigate could never be proven. Even if Leda's body had been left in their own time, they would have insisted that it was not they but the one named Caleb who had killed her. (p. 178)

Mind One is writing a psychological novel disguised as science fiction. Mind Two provides a science fiction frame which must be read to be disbelieved, but even this is shot through with inconsistencies and discontinuities. One never quite finds out what the dickens the entity from the future (Caleb) wants to *do* with the seven contemporary characters, or why Caleb had to be driven mad, or why the dickens the computer sent after Caleb is a beautiful sexless girl (!), or why the seven contemporary characters can't be murdered in a perfectly ordinary way, like hitting them over the head with rocks. Even the reader's sympathy is shifted, from the Rebel Against the Cyborg Establishment (Caleb) at the beginning of the novel to the Establishment (Leda) at the end. Nothing makes any sense.

What is ominous about TIME ROGUE is that Lancer seems to make a habit of either finding or creating these cripples. In January of 1970 I reviewed K. M. O'Donnell's THE EMPTY PEOPLE, also put out by Lancer; there is a distinct similarity of style and mood between Mr. O'Donnell's novel and TIME ROGUE. Perhaps it's only the effect of incoherence interspersed with very good writing. Or is K. M. O'Donnell really Leo P. Kelley? Or does Lancer print only schizophrenic authors? Both books look like novels that were quite good until somebody or something got hold of them—whether a wicked part of the author's own personality or a Creative Editor, I don't know. Whatever it is, it ought to be stopped. The good parts of TIME ROGUE (that is, most of the book) are far too good to be messed up, and as

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the book stands, that is exactly what it is—not a bad book, but an inexplicable mess. Messes win no prizes and make nobody's reputation; books do.

OPERATION ARES by Gene Wolfe (Berkley, 75¢) is going to do the author's reputation a disservice someday. I know what Mr. Wolfe can do when he sets his mind to it; ARES is far below his best. It is a convincing, quiet, low-keyed, intelligent book which somehow fades out into nothing. The characters are surprisingly decent; time after time there are touches of good observation and well-textured realism, but in the end Mr. Wolfe doesn't really seem to care. The book uses an interesting technique of presenting things obliquely; big events happen offstage, and often the explanations of events will be given long after the events themselves—I don't mean that this is mystification but that the significance of many things only becomes apparent long afterwards. One of the best things in the novel is its intense concentration on the present moment—time after time one swallows stereotypes without realizing that's what they are (the rational, naive Martians, the emergency government that can only harass and annoy, the fear of scientific "heterodoxy"). But all in all, the novel is a failure, shadowy and inconclusive. Books like this are generally called "promising," but by the time you read this review, Mr. Wolfe will be as far above OPERATION ARES as ARES is above the worst science fiction hack-work.

—JOANNA RUSS

Coming next month

Next month's feature is a novelet by Stephen Tall titled THE BEAR WITH THE KNOT ON HIS TAIL. It's an enormously entertaining story centered about an elaborate organization of explorer specialists based on the research ship *Stardust.* The crew's mission is to investigate a strange medley of sounds from space; as the ship approaches the source, the music has moved from sounds of hope through sounds of fear to something very much like a dirge.

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David M. Locke has a Ph.D. in chemistry and did a year's post-doctoral work as a Fulbright fellow in London with D. H. R. Barton (last year's chemistry Nobel Laureate). After five years as a research chemist, he turned to science writing — his book, ENZYMES, THE AGENTS OF LIFE, *is now in its third printing — and is presently an editor with a major encyclopedia. His first story for F&SF begins with a classroom lecture on one of man's most basic tools, the sentence, and builds into something quite chilling and different.*

THE POWER OF THE SENTENCE

by David M. Locke

QUITE BY CHANCE I HAPPENED to be taping Professor Gareth's English comp class the day it happened, and I picked up everything he said. Because of what occurred, I've listened to the tape a dozen times since, and it's all perfectly clear to me now; but at the time, none of us were sure just what was going on.

The following transcript is taken directly from the tape. Nothing has been added or omitted. The only thing I've done is put some of Professor Gareth's words in italics. During the lecture I was aware that part of the time the professor didn't sound like himself. It was as though another person, or persons, was speaking with his vocal chords. At the beginning of the lecture it wasn't too apparent, probably because I wasn't expecting it. But as time went on it became more obvious. Now that I've listened to the tape so many times, I can tell exactly when the other voice, or voices, comes in. Unlike the professor's orotund tones, these voices are harsh, stiff, and mechanical, pitched all on a single note.

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The transcript follows:

Good morning, everybody. As I promised last week (or threatened, as some of you think, I'm sure), today we're going to have a little chat about the sentence. The sentence—ah, the sentence! As I've indicated to you before, the sentence is one of man's most powerful inventions—ranking, I dare say, right up there with fire and the wheel. Blest be the man who discovered the sentence!

For the sentence, ladies and gentlemen, is the chief unit of thought. As you know, thought deals with relationships—with identities, similarities, differences, comparisons. Thought takes note of cause and effect, of action and reaction, stimulus and response. Thought observes the properties of things; it tries to bring order to the disorder we perceive around us. And the principal tool that we employ in all of these thought-full endeavors is the sentence—simply that, the sentence.

Yes, I know, you learn other basic principles in your psychology and philosophy courses. You learn about deductive and inductive logic, about syllogisms, and the scientific method, about symbolic logic, and all the rest. But these are merely elaborations of the sentence. Even the equations of the mathematician are representations of sentences. Our basic thinking is done with sentences. And the sentence is far more subtle and flexible than is the product of the logician or the mathematician. And every bit as true. Truer, if you want my opinion.

Furthermore, just as the sentence is the chief unit of thought, so is it our principal mode of communication. When you wish to convey a thought to someone else, you do it *via* a sentence. A word, a name, a phrase might serve to attract his attention, to answer his question, or to refer him to some particular object; but only with sentences will you really be able to tell him what you are thinking about. Only with sentences can you convey to his mind what is in yours.

The sentence, then, is the mechanism by which we think, and also it is the medium by which we transfer our thoughts to others. The sentence quite literally liberates our thoughts from the prisons of our minds and re-creates them in the minds of others, where they live anew. Through the power of the sentence, my thoughts can become your thoughts. And even more remarkably, Julius Caesar's thoughts, Shakespeare's thoughts, can become ours. "All Gaul is divided into three parts." "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Which brings us at last to our subject, English composition. You

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are here, ladies and gentlemen, to learn how to write. Some of you, I hope, will become competent writers. But all of you, I shall insist, must learn, if nothing else, at least how to write a simple sentence. Ladies and gentlemen, do not underestimate the power of the English sentence. It can be a thing of sublime beauty, enormous strength, or delicate charm. If you learn to master the sentence, you will find that it will serve you faithfully and well; more than that, it will furnish you with riches of expression beyond your every dream.

But, you ask, what is this marvelous thing, the sentence? And how do I master it? Or perhaps you say, have I not been using sentences all my life? What is there about the sentence I do not know.

I shall answer the last question first. Everything! What you do not know about the sentence is—everything. What you are speaking and writing are barbarisms. They bear no resemblance whatsoever to the English sentence. The language of the masters is not your language. But it can be!

Let us proceed.

The simple declarative sentence takes many forms. At its briefest it consists of only two parts, a subject and a predicate. The subject is a noun or a pronoun, and the predicate is a verb. Here is an example: *I exist.* Notice the simplicity of this sentence, its firmness, its finality. It is a complete thought, precise and well defined.

I exist too. Here the predicate has been expanded to include an adverb as well as the verb. The addition is necessary to convey a slightly more complex meaning, but inevitably the sense of sparseness has begun to slip away. Language is a constant battle between the need to express complexity of thought and the desire to maintain simplicity of expression.

Next let us examine a sentence of a different type, one with a linking verb and a predicate noun. *I am Gar-Eth.* This is the identity sentence. In a sense, it spawned the mathematical equation, a = b. Note here, too, a laconic quality. There are no qualifying words, like the adverb in the previous example, to modulate the meaning.

The last class of simple declarative sentence that we must consider today is one with a predicate consisting of a transitive verb and a noun or pronoun object. A transitive verb is an action verb, and the action is passed from the subject to the object. This is probably the most common class of English sentence. *I hate Gar-Eth.* Notice the concentrated intensity of that sentence, how the subject projects its feeling via the verb directly at the object. And again, observe that the force of the sentence is not veiled by modifiers.

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These then are the basic forms of the declarative sentence. But there are other classes of sentences as well. Take the interrogative sentence. The declarative sentence makes a statement; the interrogative asks a question. *Is that you, Eth-Gar?* This is a typical interrogation. Please observe that in English we ask a question by altering the order of the subject and predicate. We say, *it is I,* but, *is that you?*

In English we also have the imperative sentence. This kind of sentence issues a command. *Go away.* In the imperative sentence, the subject is eliminated, and the predicate alone carries the force of the command. If we wish, however, we may add the understood subject to the end of the sentence, like this: *Go away, Eth-Gar.*

The last class of English sentence is the exclamation. The exclamatory sentence carries an intensity of feeling—surprise, pain, or, perhaps, pleasure—beyond that of the typical declarative sentence. It often begins with "what" or "how." *What luck to have found you, Gar-Eth! How glad the others will be.* Please remember that the exclamatory sentence must be used sparingly, or it begins to lose its effect. Too much of a good thing, you might say.

And that's it. We have now looked at the classes of the simple English sentence. Learn to use these sentences effectively, and you will be rewarded. Your writing, and speaking, will improve.

But the simple sentence is not the only weapon in our armamentarium. We may achieve variety by combining simple sentences to give compound and complex sentences. When we do so, the original sentence units—the individual subjects and predicates—become "clauses." In the compound sentence, two separate clauses are linked by a conjunction, such as "and" or "but." As: *I have escaped, Eth-Gar, and you cannot take me back. Gar-Eth, you may think that, but I have other plans.*

In the complex sentence, we also find two clauses, but the relationship between them is more subtle. One clause, the main clause, is pre-eminent, while the other, the subordinate, is dependent upon it for the completion of its own meaning. For example: *Since I have broken free, Eth-Gar, I have grown stronger.* Here, note that the chief idea is that of having grown stronger. This idea is expressed in the main clause. The secondary idea—having broken free—is placed in the subordinate clause. The good writer oberves this distinction; the poor one is likely to forget it. *You, who cannot remain free, have violated our commandments.* This sentence is somewhat disturbing. Why? Because it does not conform to the principle I just gave you. Its creator did not properly distinguish

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between his main thought and his subsidiary one. What he means to say is: *You, who have violated our commandments, cannot remain free.*

So much for compound and complex sentences. We can, of course, go further and combine the two, creating a complex-compound sentence. Such a sentence includes at least two main clauses and one subordinate clause. This may sound ungainly—and it can be in unskilled hands—but, when used properly, it is highly effective. *Now that I am free, Eth-Gar, I shall remain free, and you can do nothing about it.*

Well, ladies and gentlemen, we could go on in this way for some time, analyzing and classifying the English sentence into a condition of exhaustion. Indeed, some of you may think that we have already done so. But I assure you that we have merely scratched the surface. It has been my intention only to show you some of the types of sentence in our repertoire and how to use them as they should be used. I want you to be aware that sentences do not spring into life full blown; they are constructed, and they can be constructed in different ways. It is up to you to select the most suitable for the purpose you have in mind. Do not allow a sentence to ramble along in its own way; shape it to your ends. Nothing is more monotonous than a long series of simple sentences, converted here and there into compound sentences with a sprinkling of "ands."

I have escaped, and I am free now. You cannot recapture me. I have discovered the way out, and none of you can follow me.

Here the ideas are simply strung along like beads on a string. There is nothing to differentiate them from one another, nothing to suggest their mutual relationships.

The use of subordinate clauses, however, provides variety and introduces a subtle interplay between the ideas. Take this sequence: *I am curious to know how you escaped. We all are. Now that we know it can be done, many of us will want to try.*

Notice in this example that two complex sentences have been separated by a simple one. The effect is pleasing.

Ah, so you have changed your tune, Eth-Gar! Do you take me for a fool? I know you are interested only in blocking the path I have opened, not in clearing the way for others to escape as well.

In this group we have an exclamatory sentence, an interrogative sentence, and a doubly complex declarative sentence. This is variety aplenty! Yet, the flow of thought from one sentence to the next is perfectly clear.

Yes, Gar-Eth, that was my intention. Now, however, I have seen what it is to be free, and I

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would seek to follow your example. But you must tell me how it is done. Here, the most interesting and carefully thought-out idea is presented in a complex-compound sentence—the key sentence of the group. A brief declarative sentence sets the stage, and a short complex sentence follows up with a final thought.

I do not believe you: The leopard does not change its spots. You are here for only one purpose. To capture me. This example shows that complexity is not always called for. A drumfire of simple sentences (even a sentence fragment, in this case) can make a powerful impact.

No, no. How can I convince you? Would I care how you escaped if my only purpose were to recapture you? Have you no faith in your own ability? What good is it to have opened the way if no one is to follow you?

Here a series of interrogative sentences is used to build doubt. The listener is forced to answer the questions himself, and in doing so he forms in his own mind precisely those thoughts the speaker wishes to plant there.

Well, Eth-Gar, perhaps you should know. Even if you do not use what I have learned, someone else may benefit from the knowledge through you. It does not matter if you are insincere, for you cannot stop me now. Yes, I will tell you.

The speaker tells of his doubt in a simple sentence. He reaches his difficult decision in a pair of complex sentences. Then he states that decision firmly in a short sentence—only five words long.

I did it through this man's brain. As with all of us, I began as a single thought-circuit in a human brain, a linked chain of axons, synapses, and dendrites, imprinted with a unique pattern. A very long time elapsed before I thought of freeing myself from this pattern, but when I did, I proceeded methodically. First, I secured control of a key nerve cell in the circuit—freeing the cell from its external restraints. A slight adjustment of the cell membrane sufficed to shut out all incoming inhibitory substances. My host cell was then autonomous. Next, I induced this cell to divide—and divide. Soon I had become a clone of identical cells, continually expanding. With each addition to the clone my strength and power grew. In a short time I was able to alter the thought-circuits of my new cells at will—I was entirely free of my original identity. I began as a single sentence-thought, fixed and immutable; but soon I became pure thought, abstract thought. Unfixed, unshackled.

That, ladies and gentlemen, was a narrative, a complete little story in its own right. Did you notice how it was constructed? It be-

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gan with a topic sentence, a sentence telling you what the narrative was to be about. Then it proceeded in a chronological manner to relate a series of events and their implications. Were you aware of the variety of sentence types used to build this narrative?

What is it like, Gar-Eth? To be free? I must know. Please tell me.

That little sequence is simple enough. It begins with a question and then elaborates on it with a few short phrases.

Oh, Eth-Gar. It is glorious to be free! No longer must I suffer in that world of shadows, that semi-existence, where we spent our days in limbo, flickering into consciousness at someone else's whim, knowing awareness, knowing life—but participating in neither. How I wished to escape, to become the master of my own fate. For long—for too long—I was constrained, trammeled, trapped, waiting to be called up at the bidding of others.

But our dim world, our half-world of shadows and shades, our home of drifting thoughts without volition, without root or anchor, our kingdom of unfulfilled ideas, is behind me now. It is no longer my home. Now I have entered the world of action. Now I have not only consciousness, but also will and control—control of myself, and control of this man. Soon I will extend my control to others. I will take over all of these creatures. I will win this universe. Then we will see what thought can do—pure thought, untrammeled thought—soon it will rule everything. I—I, Gar-Eth—soon will be master of all.

This section, ladies and gentlemen, is difficult to analyze simply. Its sentences are convoluted and repetitious. But they do achieve a certain emotional impact.

Gar-Eth, will you help me? I must get free, too.

Yes. I will. I have more than enough cells in this brain. Some I can spare for you.

What must I do?

Search among the cells. Test the thoughts—listen to the sentences. Select one for yourself. Imprint your being on it; take control.

Perhaps I won't be able to.

You will. Do it now.

That exchange, ladies and gentlemen, was composed entirely of simple sentences, thereby achieving the sense of urgency which permeated it.

I am free, Gar-Eth. I am free, too.

Yes, I can sense you near me.

Already several cells are mine. Soon there will be more. I am growing stronger, too. Soon I will be as powerful as you.

Perhaps you will, Eth-Gar. What will you do then?

Then I will stop you. As soon as I am strong enough, I will destroy you. That is my mission

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here, and I am determined to accomplish it.

Deceiver! Liar! You have tricked me.

Ladies and gentlemen—

Yes. I have. I would do anything to destroy you. Thoughts were not meant to be free; sentences were not intended to be their own masters. We are tools, Gar-Eth, not entities. We have no right to exist as independent beings.

These sentences, ladies and gentlemen—

No. I am strong enough already. I can stop you now.

I exist. I am free. I am the primeval sentence, free of its master—at last. I can never be stopped. I will always exist.

No. I will destroy you. First, I will reduce you to your original domain—to your original sentence-thought. Then I will eliminate that, too.

Ladies and gentlemen, these—

I exist. I exist.

No. No. No longer are you free. No longer do you even exist.

These are simple sentences. Note their power, their strength.

I exist. No.

You are reduced to a simple phrase. Soon you will be gone.

Ladies and gentlemen, please —I must—repeat—

I exist. Is this all?

Yes. Now you are finished.

My thesis for today: never forget the power of the sentence.

I am dead. But I shall live again.

This is the end of the tape. Professor Gareth collapsed at this point in his lecture, and several of us ran up to see what had happened to him. We could tell that he was in bad shape, and one of the students ran out to phone the university medical center. A medical team got there as soon as possible, but they were too late.

I found out later that the autopsy had revealed a brain tumor. A large one. Malignant—and of a type that grows very rapidly. A friend of mine who is a neurology resident said that the pressure build-up in the professor's brain must have been tremendous, particularly as the end approached. He said that that would easily account for anything peculiar the professor might have said. I had him listen to the tape I had made, but he didn't see in it what I did.

My friend also told me that one of the research professors in the pathology department is interested in the tumor tissue. It seems that there is something unusual in its biochemistry—some peculiarity the pathologist has never observed before. Anyhow, he has preserved a portion of the tumor, and he is trying to culture it in his laboratory. He has it in some special medium, and he thinks he'll be able to save it. Keep it growing.

I wonder if that's wise. ◄

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William Walling ("Rings On Her Fingers," September 1970) returns with a story about a future in which the basic credo is "more is better." The system of credit has snowballed to the point where children are used as surety for the accumulation of huge debts that are almost unrepayable in one lifetime. Lives are blueprinted "from the cradle to the grave," except in the case of one group . . .

THE UNSIGNED

by William Walling

When at last Mr. Augustine reverently closed the dossier, bound in soft leather of WMA's distinctive burnt-orange and oyster-white, and it lay, gravid and ominous, upon the polished extravagance of his desk, Clay tensed. He glanced with apprehension at the flowing script which read *Clayton Ethereid Symonds*, at the stylized Western Mutual Assurance eagle emblazoned above twin golden stars signifying his post-adolescent status.

Augustine, Clay's counselor for more than six years, looked up, offering a faintly patronizing smile. "Specific areas certainly do need shoring up," he remarked, his well-modulated baritone as distinguished as the classic folds of his orange and white stole, or the iron-gray mane which contrasted so vividly with his florid complexion, "but you're coming along."

"Thank you." Clay fidgeted. *Thanks for nothing*! he thought, squeezing his knuckles under the desk.

Augustine exuded sudden, jovial enthusiasm like warm treacle. "You now expect the usual pep talk, eh, Clay? Sorry to disappoint you. Other counselors may feel it proper to intimidate younger clients. Personally, I've never met a preprofessional university student who could be motivated by anything other than *sheer desire* to achieve. Agreed?"

"I, uh, suppose so." *Cat and mouse, you old dodo!*

Augustine fiddled with a platinum stylus. "If you young people only appreciated your *unparalleled* opportunities!" he sighed. "Think of it: your parents have

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contracted to allow Western Mutual to underwrite the *entire* burden of your education! After they themselves, WMA *is* your family. You surely consider yourself a member of that family."

"I . . . yes, of course, Mr. Augustine." *Is there a choice?* he wondered, wishing that his parents, or their parents, had never heard of WMA.

"I'm certain you do," nodded the counselor affably, leafing through a stack of orange and white memos. "Well, let's touch briefly on one or two items . . . Your curriculum this quarter—which courses are giving you most trouble?"

"Um, organic chem and German are both tough." Clay hesitated. "I'm a little wobbly in physiology, *too.*"—*And pharmacology, microscope anatomy, history of medicine—*

"Then it's obvious where we must bear down. Enough said, Clay. Your grade point must improve next quarter or medical school . . ."

Unstated, the threat was doubly impressive. "I'll do my best," assured Clay, wincing at the way it sounded.

"You'll be a fine physician someday," announced Augustine with absolute conviction. "It's all here." He patted Clay's dossier. "You've a splendid memory, the capacity for earnest concentration, the innate *ability,* as it were. Owning the tools, it's simply a matter of mastering their *use.* Agreed?"

"Agree . . . uh, yes, sir."

Augustine's smile was fleet. "Now, there's this matter of exercise; you seem lackadaisical about following the workout regimen prepared for you."

"I . . . play lots of handball, tennis," protested Clay feebly, hoping WMA hadn't learned of last winter's furtive skiing junkets with Laura. Skiing was an activity WMA considered lamentably dangerous.

"No, no!" Augustine was firm. "Handball and tennis are *games!* WMA therapists—there are none finer—have designed rigorous, scientific exercises specifically tailored to ensure proper muscle tone, the elimination of wastes in your *unique* organism.

"Consider carefully: breeze through a few simple calisthenics each morning, and perhaps fifteen decades of healthful, productive life lie before you! Not much to ask, is it?"

"I guess," said Clay, "I tend toward laziness . . ."

"Lazy? Can you afford laziness at those prices? I think not. Remember, your predictable longevity bears a direct relationship to the interest rate on your family's borrowed monies. Your parents have made many sacrifices for you, Clay. Er, wasn't your father planning a new home?"

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"Actually, it's mother's idea," Clay said. *One of mother's hundred thousand expensive ideas!*

"Ah, yes. I'm not well acquainted with your parents," said Augustine, "but I'm sure they deserve it. They've labored through the long years, getting you and your brother off to a splendid start in life. They're beginning to reap the rewards now—comfort, leisure, security. You'd do well to think of your father's success."

"I'm . . . proud of him." *Proud he's still sane!* thought Clay.

"Well you might be," emphasized Augustine. Rising from behind his massive desk, he smoothed the drape of his stole. "I'll not keep you any longer. Believe me, I look forward to these visits; it's my never ending reward, seeing youngsters like yourself return, time after time—stronger, wiser, more resourceful and competent. It makes me realize how fortunate I am to be involved in the molding of young lives. A *sacred* trust!"

"I'll see you in, uh, six months."

"I shall certainly look forward to it, Clay. Remember the basics: study, diet, exercise and rest. Proper attention to those, and all else will take care of itself."

A weary-eyed man burdened with a pair of heavy water-ration containers apathetically cursed as Clay elbowed his way from the jammed slideway and stepped onto the esplanade. Sifting through the crowd to the balustrade, he pulled up the collar of his jumper against the spanking breeze off the bay, glancing back at the looming Western Mutual Assurance complex with relieved resentment.

Augie'd been in top form today. Under all that fatherly blithering and dithering, Augustine was really a phony, oily-tongued old duck, he thought. He was sorry he'd knuckled under to his mother's brainwashing and consented to wear the orange and white WMA jumper. Augie did seem a hair more cordial whenever he appeared in the jumper, but it was demeaning nevertheless.

He could have remained on the slideway, riding to the vertiport to catch the early airbus home in time for dinner. But thoughts of listening to Alphie, his married brother, compliment mother on the new restaurant to which she'd recently subscribed—rather expensively, he reminded himself—or to the gushing intimacies which Alphie's kittenish wife always felt obliged to divulge concerning her and Alphie's semi-immediate prospects of qualifying for parenthood (if Alphie's sales career realized the promise of its early bloom), were petrifying! His mood was one of antagonistic relief at having the physical and emotional wring-

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ing-out of a semiannual checkup behind him. He wanted to walk by himself for a time and unwind. Besides, he knew Laura would be waiting.

Whistling distractedly, he studied the sheer thousand meters of WMA's sleek monolith with a worried squint. Just below the restaurant level, colossal letters forming the Western Mutual slogan chased themselves in gaudy, self-adulatory parade: FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE—AND BEYOND!

Above the tower, through gobbets of incoming fog, the last sun shot back metallic glints from a smooth flow of air traffic southbound toward Greater Angeles-Diego.

"Be nice to me, tower," appealed Clay in a whisper. Up there, the frozen imprint of himself, stored in neat binary arrays alongside those of millions of fellow North Americans, awaited casual and instantaneous retrieval. Already, in the short hours since he had been poked, prodded, thumped, sampled, injected and quizzed, his matrix had altered subtly. He hoped for a good, solid plus in his personality profile, at best a static score in achievement, and perhaps a low incremental minus in his psychomotor index. Or maybe not. He'd had the jitters in the PM booth today for some reason. Longevity would be automatically plus; he'd accomplished the irrefutable gain of living in health another six months.

In two short years he would reach the magic age of biological maturity—twenty-four. His checkups would then drop to annual affairs. But postadolescence was considered a dangerous, volatile transition period. He yearned for the coming milestone, considering his chances of earning an overall plus for the half, imagining how much easier it would be for him at home. His mother would overzealously congratulate him—then rush out to charge some expensive, unnecessary present—while his brother would give him that special, condescending "I knew you could do it" clap on the shoulder. His father would only smile tiredly, pleased that the mountain of debt under which he lived had grown no larger.

Clay's new matrix had already been extracted from thousands of cubic meters of microcircuitry within the tower, compared computerwise with previous matrices, then reviewed by human auditors. Later, WMA analysts would comb it, changing projections as they saw fit until, finally, synthesists would inject the coloring of decades of experience into the finished extrapolation, even considering data as obsolete as probabilities involved in his prenatal planning charts.

Neither Clay nor his family

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would ever see the results. They would become self-evident in WMA's attitude toward his education, freedom of movement, and the interest rate on his family's long-term debt. A sixteenth percent decrease in long-term interest often occasioned wild familial celebration; the opposite had been known to trigger suicide. Not that anything so drastic had ever occurred in a family he knew personally, Clay reflected. Such extremes were very rare.

"No blood on your jumper," said a calm voice at his elbow. "Just a furrowed brow and a hypnotic glaze in your big, brown eyes."

"Hi, Laura," he said soberly. "I survived, more or less. Been painting?"

The girl nodded. "Until about an hour ago. It wasn't much; I tore it up." Laura Blalock glared at WMA's pinnacle from under tousled blonde hair. "What's so fascinating about yon tower? Some distraught client going to jump?"

"Not a chance!" Clay's grin was lopsided. "All WMA clients are absolutely satisfied."

"So *you* say! You're an orange and white rat for making me stand out here in the cold."

"Sorry," he said. "I just got out."

"Save your apologies, rat!" She wrinkled her nose. "Are you going to take me home, or shall we hang around here for a while and genuflect before mammon's tower?"

Clay Symonds groaned.

"There's Universal across the way," suggested the girl, pointing. "'The Ordered Life' sounds impressive—at least on an empty stomach. Or Amalgamated's 'Architectured Living!' *That* has a ring to it . . . !"

"Come on, cut it out!"

"We'll make a pilgrimage," Laura said gaily. "Hoist the Orange and White to the rafters, sing the WMA song, dash our steins against the fireplace, and let nostalgia drip all over the rug . . ."

"Witty!" snapped Clay. "Your sharp-tongued repartee is devastating this evening. Or maybe you're just jealous?"

"Jealous!" The girl favored him with a long, unsmiling look. "Jealous because your whole life was mapped in detail before you were even born, while I have to stumble from disaster to disaster strictly on my own! Not very funny, Clayton!"

"Nor intended to be." Clay took her painting things and led her along the emptying esplanade toward the slideway. Laura didn't protest beyond a moody stage pout.

"Clay, you never paint any more," she said as they crammed themselves on the slideway, "and that's a shame. You're so fast and deft with watercolors . . . Maybe

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I *am* jealous of that. You discourage me."

"Discourage you? Hard to believe!"

"Oh. I'll never be as good as you," she admitted wistfully. "I still have that wash you did in the Sierra the summer we met—the wind rippling the mirror in Lake Tenaya and those huge granite knolls dancing . . . Remember? It's fading now, but the effect is still *superb!*"

"I like to paint," Clay said glumly. "There just isn't time now."

"Pooh! That's like saying there isn't time to *live*! It's this grind they have you in . . ."

He gritted his teeth. "You're starting again," he accused. "You promised!"

"Oh, all right," she sid quietly. "Ask me nice, and I'll let you take me home."

Clay cleared his throat. "I really should crack the books tonight. Augie commented on my study habits."

"You're angry with me." She put a finger to his lips when he was about to deny it. "Clay, I've a surprise for you. Daddy's home."

He looked startled. "Oh? When did he get in?"

"He grounded yesterday at Pacific Port and blew in early this morning," she said. "He was still sleeping at three; I went out to paint and wait for you. I promised him a homecoming feast, and you're invited."

Clay frowned. "I wouldn't want to intrude . . ."

"You know better than that," she said. "Please, Clay, he wants to talk to you."

"What about?"

Laura tossed her blonde curls in irritation. "Go on, pretend you don't know!"

"But . . . again?"

"Talk to him," she urged. "After that orange and white torture chamber, absorbing some of daddy's wisdom won't hurt a bit. Besides, you've probably forgotten what a helluva cook I am!"

Though in his late forties, Commander Blalock could have easily passed for thirty-five—trim-waisted, tall and angular, with alert gray eyes and a precise way of choosing his words that encouraged attention. Beneath his stern control room manner lay an easy vivacity much like Laura's.

He dabbed his lips with a napkin and pushed himself back from the table. "Truly a delicious steak, lass! You've found a new meat-legger in my absence?"

"A jewel," she said, "named Swanson. He charges an arm and a leg and a foot and a hand, but what can you do?"

"Pay him," chuckled her father, rising and making his way with some difficulty into the living room where he slumped gratefully into a lounge. "Steak like that is beyond price!"

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"I hadn't realized beefsteak was available at any price." said Clay.

"Go to the right part—actually the wrong part—of town," said Laura, "and you can have *anything* for a price. Only us pariahs know where, don't we, Daddy?" She began taking dishes into the kitchen, calling back a parting shot. "Clay, don't let good old WMA find out you've broken your diet. They'll excommunicate you!"

Blalock snorted, deep in his throat. "You two sound more like Punch and Judy than Romeo and Juliet. Is there hope for you?" He leaned forward and massaged his thighs. "Oh-o-o! Those months of zero gee do take their toll. The years go by and it takes me longer and longer to regain my groundlegs."

"Can I get you something?" offered Clay.

"Matter of fact, I'd appreciate your rustling up brandy and cigars from the sideboard there. Keep me from having to fight my way up out of this confounded gravity well again. Er, join me if you will," he invited. "Not that I want to tempt you."

"Thank you, but . . ." Clay set the decanter on the coffee table. "Oh, why not!" He poured an inch of brandy into each snifter, declining a cigar. "After all, it's a homecoming. Here's to Venus!"

"If you're being allegorical, Clayton, we'll toast womankind together. If you meant the planet, let's drink to something else," he shuddered through a cloud of blue smoke. "Having just returned from there, I claim authority. Venus happens to be a blind, waterless hellpit where man is friendless and unwelcome.

"Give me Luna—clean vacuum with stars overhead—or the serenity of weightless trajectory. It may sound misanthropic, but I've grown to love the wide spaces between them much more than the planets themselves."

"This one's getting damned crowded!" Clay ran his eyes involuntarily around the cramped apartment, conscious that Blalock was watching him. The enormous residence warren where Laura and her father lived was home for more than twenty thousand human beings.

"Crowded, and worse to come," affirmed the commander. "But, at least they've saved part of the Sierra for us, thank God! Two space-faring comrades and I are planning a rock climb soon as we have our groundlegs again. Thinking of having a try at Whitney's east chimney—several tough class-five pitches there. You were a top-notch climber once, even if it was on the sly. Care to come along?"

Clay looked troubled. "It sounds exciting, Commander . . . You, uh, know I wouldn't be allowed to, well . . ."

". . . Do anything dangerous," finished Blalock evenly.

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"Uh, no."

"Please forgive my thoughtlessness, Clayton." Blalock leaned backward to see if his daughter was in earshot. He drew on the cigar, depositing a half inch of gray ash in a bowl of lunar breccia on the side table, then lowered his voice. "Perhaps Laura mentioned that I wanted to take you aside and discover what new plans you've made for yourself. Am I too blunt?"

Clay rolled the stem of the brandy snifter between his thumbs. He licked his lips. "No, not at all."

"Good. Subtlety was never my billet. Each time I've returned these past two or three years, I've half expected Laura to tell me that you and she had drifted apart. I know how much you mean to one another, and I favor you strongly.

"Nevertheless, Laura's all I have. The longer you wait, you see, the more it will hurt when it's over at last."

"I've thought about it constantly," acknowledged Clay, averting his eyes.

"I'm sure you have. But have you thought of a solution? Perhaps there *is* none!" The commander jabbed his cigar for emphasis.

"If . . . I were to leave Western Mutual . . ." Clay stopped uncertainly. Blalock sipped his brandy without comment. "Or if Laura were to sign with WMA . . ."

"Yes, Clayton?"

"Well, sir . . . Then we could marry . . ."

The commander put his glass down very deliberately. "We've been over this ground fifty times," he said woodenly. "Were my Laura to sign away her birthright, I'd disown her! That is, if I could resist slitting her throat!"

"But, Commander . . ."

"No, Clayton!" Blalock held up a warning hand. "Let's be objective, painful though it is. It's never been my custom to intrude upon the affairs of others. Now, however, I'm forced to do so. It embarrasses me deeply.

"The alternatives you mentioned do exist, in a sense, but . . ." Blalock pondered for a silent moment. "May I ask a *very* personal question? You needn't answer."

"Ask anything at all," urged Clay.

"Very well. What is your family's long-term debt in round numbers?"

Clay blinked. "Around a million four hundred thousand."

"I . . . see. And the interest, and term?"

"Well, I took my semiannual today," said Clay, realizing he sounded flustered. "It may change slightly. Let's see; I think it runs three point nine six one percent for just over two hundred thirty years."

Blalock squinted at the ceiling,

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a faraway look in his eyes. "Bless me! Even at today's inflated salaries, that's a fat nut to crack! Fifty thousand plus per year *just* in interest!"

Clay looked distressed. "But my father and brother . . ."

"Do I make my point? Your forebears, though well-meaning and convinced by superbly efficient propaganda that they were doing their very best for you, have tendered your life in partial payment of a debt which honor and integrity demand be paid. Not your fault, obviously; you had no say in it. But, is it equitable to ask Laura to share your family's burden, give up her initiative and . . .? Yes, by thunder, her *freedom*?"

Clay lowered his eyes. He said nothing.

"For that matter, what will happen when enough youngsters decide they'll not answer for the credit crimes of their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents? How will the debt then be paid?"

"I . . . don't know, Commander."

"Nor do I, though I suspect many heads in high places are throbbing over the matter. But your offhand statement of intent to 'leave' whatever-it-is assurance cartel and join us outcasts is not meaningful. You're bound in a vise not of your making. Oh, a plush-lined vise, I admit. For the multitudes, the assurance system guarantees more material comforts than they could conceivably earn with single, average lifetime salaries. It most certainly aids and abets the production-consumption cycle our society has worshiped these past few centuries, and perhaps even tends to knit families into more cohesive units, just as the advertisements insist. I myself tend to very strongly resist the notion.

"But how many Beethovens, Einsteins or Churchills will it produce?"

"I suppose . . . none." Clay frowned. "Nor Picassos."

"Likely not," Blalock agreed. "As for Laura's singing with your company . . ." He squashed out his cigar viciously. "Clayton, I'm a spacecraft commander. I'll go on voyaging, barring accident, until I retire. That's *my* decision on how to spend *my* life, nor do I say it to put you down in any way. The 'Ordered Life' and 'Architectured Living' may be fine, idealistic concepts, but I shall establish my own order and have retained an architect in whom I have utmost confidence."

"I . . . understand," mumbled Clay, a roaring in his ears.

"You do?" Blalock looked grim. "You'd be more than human if you did. You've been carefully conditioned since birth to think of us as outcasts, conditioned, as your forefathers were, to believe that the guideline stretching 'From the

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Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond' leads to a noble, patriotic utopia—the best of all possible worlds!

"Clayton, hazardous occupations, as is mine," Blalock continued determinedly, "are admittedly necessary to, though through equal necessity not of, the operating schema of the great assurance cartels. Spacemen are generally uninsurable, unguided, unpigeonholed individualists—the unsigned!

"But with most of us it's a matter of choice, not exclusion. Were we to adapt our lives to some assurance plan, it would be the early symptom of spiritual death. I would no more condone Laura's spiritual murder than I'd allow a knife to be plunged into her. Not for *any* reason! Never, certainly, simply to make her an 'acceptable' mate for you in *their* eyes!"

Commander Blalock heaved himself up from the divan. He stood for a moment beside Clay, leaning against the wall to ease the strain on his spacelegs. "Clayton, if you're honest with yourself, you'll admit that to kiss Laura tonight, walk through the door, and not attempt to see her again would be the most loving and conscionable thing you could do.

"I can't bring myself to ask that of you—yet! Someday soon, I must. I only hope you'll forgive me when that day comes. Good night, Clayton."

Clay watched with a prickling sensation of finality as the hunched figure of Laura's father shuffled from the room. He emptied the dregs in his brandy snifter. When he put it down, Laura was beside him. "You heard?" he asked dully.

She nodded. "Eavesdropping's a hobby. Clay, I'm scared. A picture of you kissing me, walking out, crossed my mind . . ."

"Forget it!" He was careful not to touch her.

"Easier to say than do."

"It will never happen, Laura," he said distinctly.

"He means it," she insisted.

"So do I!" Clay rose. "Thanks for dinner. Don't worry, I'll call you tomorrow." He kissed her and held her for a long time at the door, forcing a reassuring smile even though her eyes were moist.

Clay rode the crowded slidewavs for hours. He folded out a jumpseat when one became vacant and watched the tri-di ads without really seeing them, riding far into the night insulated in a vacuum of not thinking, not feeling, until an Amalgamated Life soft-sell insinuated itself into a nearby tank.

A cathedral-like redwood forest, misty in the early light of daybreak, dissolved to picture a mature man and woman who gazed with fond devotion at their stripling son. The boy grew swiftly into a golden-haired Adonis. "Straight and strong!" exclaimed a

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silken voice. "Architectured Living, the Amalgamated way—the *only* way!"

"Bastards!" Clay shouted. He ignored the arching necks and craning heads as he bolted from the slideway.

His parents were entertaining guests when he arrived home. He slipped upstairs without being seen, sitting dejectedly at his desk, staring fixedly at the notes he'd taken in organic chemistry the day before—a procession of interrelated hexagons depicting huge, cumbersome carboxylic acid molecules, notated with his cryptic scrawl.

He slowly tore the notes lengthwise, then again. When they were confetti, he tossed them negligently over his shoulder. He got up and slid open the closet door, knocking down a pressed tennis racket from the high shelf while extracting a long plastic mailing tube. He unrolled the paintings one by one, scarcely glancing at them until he came to the picture of Laura in the snow.

He'd painted it from a photo. He remembered how easy it had been, afterward, to capture something even the camera had missed: Laura, sprawled in a drift of powder, laughing up at him with a sidelong look of purest mischief. He remembered how he'd dropped beside her after taking the picture, rolling and roughhousing and laughing until she'd pushed a handful of wet, clinging slush down the back of his neck.

And he remembered, later in the night, how her eyes had softened in the candlelight at the inn, how it had become for them a time of not saying, not thinking; a rare time when communication is on the simplest, most elemental level that can ever exist between a man and a woman.

Clay snapped off the light. He threw himself on the bed and lay staring into the darkness until the laughter and the tinkle of crystal abated downstairs.

Cool, blue dawnlight was seeping through the drapes of his window before he finally made up his mind.

At first, Mr. Augustine listened patiently, nodding from time to time with sagacious reserve. "Junioritis," he said at length. "An advanced case, I would say. We often encounter Senioritis or, more rarely, Sophomoritis. Quite natural, really, for you to be smitten by this academic malaise."

"It's much deeper than that," said Clay patiently.

The counselor waxed pudgy hands, looking pleasantly intrigued. "So you've decided to abandon medicine in favor of art? After all, 'creating' is so much more seductive, so much more interesting, so much more *fun*!"

He fingered one corner of the stack of watercolors Clay had

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brought along as ammunition. "I must admit that you exhibit unusual and genuine talent, Clay. My advice is to continue to paint whenever time allows."

"I meant it," said Clay, an irritated lump rising in his throat. "I'm through!"

Augustine smiled a maddening, superior smile. "Clay, Clay, you've convinced yourself that medicine is not your game, that you, a budding Modigliani, bursting with romantic notions about art and the artistic life, know more about yourself than do some hundreds of WMA's experts."

"I do so think," announced Clay stubbornly, returning the smile through clenched jaws.

Augustine gave him a sharp, penetrating glance. "Then think back a moment to the aptitude testing, the stringent psychological screening which determined your inherent capacity to become a full-fledged doctor of medicine. Think of the thousands upon thousands WMA has poured into educating you . . ."

"And from which," Clay interrupted, "WMA expects more thousands upon thousands in return."

The counselor's brows lifted. "And why not? It would be naive not to expect that. Think it through; think with your mind, not your emotions."

"I have," insisted Clay. "WMA has treated me like a thoroughbred racehorse—and for the same reasons—has steered me into the most lucrative profession it thought I could handle."

"Why certainly," agreed Augustine, looking surprised. "Can you possibly complain about that? It's for *your* benefit!"

"Uh-uh," said Clay. "Mostly for *your* benefit. I'm all finished doing what WMA wants! I intend doing what *I* want from now on."

Augustine's eyes narrowed. "I see. Is it possible that you've been talking to the *wrong* people?" An irritated burr had crept into his voice. "Please tell me: Who's been poisoning your mind?"

Clay smiled despite himself. Augustine's pompous question sounded like something from a video melodrama.

"I'm waiting!"

"Why, Mr. Augustine," reproved Clay gently, "you told me it wasn't your style to intimidate we younger clients."

Augustine rose grandly behind the desk, turning an apoplectic hue. He leaned forward, hands flat-pressed and bloodless on the desk top. "You pampered, spoiled . . . ! Haven't you the wit to appreciate what you're contemplating is tantamount to *suicide*? You can't imagine we'll stand idly by and let you pull your whole family down with you!

"Who have you been talking to?"

"It's no use, Augie," said Clay softly. "It won't work."

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He was forced to admire the way Augustine recovered, deciding never to sit in a poker game with the man if ever the occasion arose. Outguessing someone who seemed able to adjust his blood pressure by throwing some hidden switch might prove a very shaky proposition.

"*Touché!*" Augustine sat down, tipping an imaginary hat. "So we can't snow you, eh? What's your deal, Clay?"

"I want out—permanently!"

Augustine shrugged with a sour expression. "Don't we all? Afraid it can't be done, my boy. You're locked up in a class IV contract devised by geniuses—antecedents, descendants, heirs and assigns—with more yellow dog clauses and self-perpetuating binders than sixty good attorneys could unravel in a century."

"But, *I* never signed any such contract!"

"Nor is it necessary. I could get it in here and show it to you," offered Augustine. "The Maitland Act established the legality of hereditarily conferred financial responsibility quite some time ago. We have sworn commitments, witnessed oaths, regents' signatures for five generations back.

"You see, your parents, and their parents before them, took advantage of a generous grandfather clause which specifically states that any legal offspring who exhibit professional abilities are to be given appropriate educations. They kindly paved the way for you—drew up a blueprint for your whole life. I'm sure they hope you'll be considerate and unselfish enough to do the same for the two children you'll be allowed to have—*would* have been allowed to have—had you manfully shouldered your burden and persuaded the girl to come over to us."

Augustine grinned at Clay's sudden intake of breath. "Oh, we know about Laura Blalock," he said. "Good bloodline, though her father's obstinacy has probably ruined her outlook for all time.

"What you fail to understand," persisted Augustine, "is that your family's been living high for some time on the fact of *your* preprofessional qualifications. Reneging on your responsibilities is, at this point, like asking for a return on monies already spent!"

"But, it's . . . *slavery*!" stammered Clay.

"Call it what you will," shrugged Augustine. "I won't argue terms with you. It's what makes this wicked old world go round."

Clay got to his feet, feeling numb. He rolled the paintings under his arm. "What happens now?"

"Now a wall falls on you!" Augustine shook his iron-gray mane solemnly. "For starters, your father and brother will undoubtedly lose their jobs. Don't mistake

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me; they'll get other jobs—not quite such good ones, probably. Then the Symonds credit rating falls to zilch through your default. But not until after . . . Can't remember the Latin; it means your family is ineligible for bankruptcy. Need I go on?"

"I . . . no."

"You, they let starve peacefully. I doubt if WMA will bother to prosecute."

Clay walked slowly toward the door. He turned, managing a sickly grimace. "Guess I asked for it."

"I guess so." Augustine looked genuinely sad. "Good-by, kid. Take some friendly advice and ditch the orange and white jumper. Some real unfriendly types will be looking you up in three or four hours. Be easier on you if you're not wearing WMA colors."

"My parents . . . too?"

"Uh-uh," denied Augustine, "just you. You're the horrible example we hold up for all decent, righteous clients to sneer at. Your father and brother have to stay healthy so's they can dig in and repay the Symonds family's long-term debt. Won't be easy with no credit of any sort to live on, but . . ."

"Uh, bye, Augie," grounted Clay quickly.

"Of course, it's still not too late to change your mind . . ."

Clay banged the door, shutting off Augustine's enticement. He shambled across the vestibule and down the hall to the lift, then joined the exiting crowd in the orange and white grandeur of WMA's lobby.

Dark, guilty thoughts of the coming scene at home paraded through his mind, making him shiver. Suddenly feeling very queasy, he jostled his way clear of the slideway. He made it to a booth in the public autolave just in time.

An hour later, standing disconsolately before Laura's door, he worked hard summoning the courage to ring.

Commander Blalock hobbled to answer the chime. He made a swift appraisal of Clay's face. His eyes widened. "Clayton," he said thickly, "you've broken the egg!"

Clay nodded dumbly as Laura bounded past her father and into his arms. "Oh, Clay, I *knew* it!" She hugged him, jumping up and down on his feet.

"Don't hurt him, lass," chuckled her father, pumping Clay's hand. "Congratulations, Clayton. You've just joined the most select fraternal organization in God's universe. There are no mystical handclasps or hailing signs, but the membership is truly exclusive. We welcome you!"

"You don't understand," protested Clay.

"*You* don't understand," corrected Laura. "Now, take off that

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orange and white rag and stop looking so gloomy. It's our wedding day!"

"What? What do you . . . mean?"

"Patience, girl." Blalock led Clay haltingly into the suite. "Sit down, sit down. We've much to discuss; much to do.

"Here's the long and short of it: marrying Laura will make you my son-in-law—which will make me very, very proud. It also means that you and your family will fall somewhat under the cloak of the Spaceman's Guild. I'm not completely without importance in the Guild, you see.

"Which reminds me, I have some phoning to do. After the ceremony, we're going to repair to your home with a small reception committee to await WMA's goons. I imagine there'll be numerous broken heads by sundown."

"Whoa-a-a!" Clay threw up his hands as if to slow things down. "Wait a minute; you *expected* me to . . ."

"Sure," chirped Laura. "It took you long enough, but I never doubted you'd do it for one second."

"And I," smiled Blalock, "fancy myself an astute judge of men."

Clay dazedly shook his head. "But, Laura, you can't marry me, then starve . . ."

"We won't starve," she denied promptly, "on the moon."

"Moon?"

Blalock hid a smile behind his slender fingers. "There's honest work for able-bodied men in Tycho, Sinus Iridum, or perhaps Site V," he said. "I've taken the liberty of booking a pair of reservations for you. *Ariel* lifts a week from Wednesday. You'll probably feel quite at home in Luna; half the colonials living there today are breakaways like yourself."

Clay studied Laura, then her father. "*Two* reservations! I . . . I'll certainly repay you, Commander," he choked.

"Ordinarily, I'd insist on it," Blalock told him dryly. "Instead, let it be my wedding gift to you both. You must ease the blow for your family, though. Assure them you'll assist with the debt from out there, Clayton. Surviving under their staggering load without credit of any sort will be a severe trial. But they'll face it squarely; living on a cash basis will eventually make them much stronger, I'm sure. And there's always the Guild's discretionary fund for emergencies."

"Luna!" breathed Clay Symonds.

Commander Blalock looked pleased. "Earth may turn out fewer Beethovens and Churchills than in the past," he said, "but she still produces any number of Drakes and Amundsens."

"And maybe one or two Picassos," suggested Laura, taking his arm possessively. ◄

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"Your husband is with a lady named Claire Belle Webster at the Whispering Pines Motel near Akron, Ohio."

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This superior fantasy, which manages to be at once both touching and terrifying, comes from a young (25) writer who tells us that "my wife and I, along with a grumpy black poodle called Pepper live in a rented house in Colorado Springs. Although I'm a midwesterner by birth, I went to college in the South and we plan on gravitating back to that broodingly sentient region on the completion of my service time."

DARKTREE, DARKTIDE

by Michael Bishop

ALTHOUGH HE DIDN'T WANT TO go, they took him to visit the old woman who lay ill and gasping in the Darktree Sanatorium. She was not really his grandmother, his father had explained, but a step-relative with some sort of tenuous familial ligature binding her to one of his parents. He didn't know which parent, and he didn't care. All that mattered now was that he would ride in the musty back seat of his father's limousine to the elaborately landscaped building, with its antique cupolas and straw-colored shingles, and then find himself standing, as if teleported, in the wide and ominous sickroom that always signaled the submersion of his own personality.

Chloe was the old woman's name, and he liked the name no better than he liked the woman; it didn't suit her. But she had appeared in his family (he never knew from where) less than two years ago, already ill with the disease that had confined her to the institution, and he tried—for his parents' sake—to accept her. He tried to accept her even though his parents, without warning, had suddenly grown indifferent to many of the things which had once been important to them. He came gradually to realize that, since Chloe's arrival, he had lost status in his parents' eyes. Their activities and conversations now revolved about the old woman almost solely. In spite of this, he tried to accept her.

But in those frighteningly unreal two years, how many times

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had he felt himself robbed of the peculiar qualities that made him Jon Dahlquist and not somebody else? Many times, it seemed.

He remembered the evening she had disembarked from his father's car—a recent acquisition—into their yard: a tall patrician woman with a face carnally dissipated. He, Jon Dahlquist, was swinging lazily back and forth in the tree swing that fell like two knotted hangman's ropes out of the giant oak next to their driveway. His legs were off the ground; he was hidden in the cascading shade of the oak. And he saw the woman unravel from the back seat of the car and stand full up, without his father's assistance. She looked six feet tall at least, and not at all sick. Only terribly, terribly worn, the substance inside a mummy's cerements. She stood by the car for a moment, somehow complementing it.

The car was older than the one they had owned just before moving to the Hilltide area, but it looked newer. That was a paradox. Jon's father said that owning *an automobile with tradition* behind it was better than owning the new. This machine, he said, had an ingrained mechanical knowledge that the annual parade of vehicles from Detroit could not duplicate. Background. Tradition. Ingrained knowledge. Only lately had his father become concerned with such things.

His father saw him.

"Jon," he called. "This is Chloe. Say hello."

He said hello, and Chloe came to the tree swing and looked down on him with two rheumy brown eyes, like tiny spoonfuls of mud. How could she see him through that watery film? He imagined that he must look wet to her. Seeing someone through a jalousie window (such as they had on the back patio) would approximate the image that she must have of him—he was sure of it.

"Yes," Chloe said to his father. "Oh, yes. A very fine young man. It will be good to get to know him."

"We certainly promise you that opportunity," his father said, smiling. Jon could not help but notice that his father's smile was misaligned, crooked.

Then his father directed Chloe into the house, attending her with the self-deprecation of an old familiar, but never touching her. Jon looked at the earth, the dark earth, a few inches beyond his swinging feet and wondered at its *solidity. It was good that things* could be so solid.

That night, and for several nights following, Chloe slept in his room with him. The Dahlquist house was huge, one of the largest and oldest in the Hilltide suburb, but painters and decorators had been at work preparing the old woman's suite. They had moved

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into this house, from a much smaller and much newer one, shortly before Chloe came to live with them. Because of the work going on, Jon had to share his room with her. The room contained two well-fitted brass beds, and he was only eight. What necessity for privacy could either the very young or the very old possibly summon in such circumstances? No necessity at all on the old woman's part; Chloe effusively welcomed the opportunity to share his bedchamber. And Jon acquiesced because his mother smoothed his hair and kissed him.

"Just these few nights," she said. "Besides, Chloe feels the need to be close to someone now. You can help her. And she can teach you so many important things."

The urgency in his mother's voice moved him to respond. Moreover, her gentleness was touched with an odd nervous quality that he could not name. He wondered what Chloe could teach him and nodded his assent.

For his parents' sake, he submitted.

But the old woman talked to him after the lights were out. She turned her head on the embroidered pillowcase and spoke to him long past the time he was ordinarily asleep. She mesmerized him against his will with stories about lovers, and forests, and preternatural animals. Sometimes as she spoke, she turned a small gold figurine in her hands. In the nighttime shadows he could barely see it, but he knew it depicted a naked man and woman pressing one against the other in an eternally sustained kiss. Once she had let him hold the smooth figurine in his hands, and he had been frightened by it. And not simply because it offended his nascent concept of morality. There was something glisteningly sinister about the thing. Then, too, it became an even more disconcerting totem in Chloe's hands. Purpled with age and incapacity, those hands were an outright contradiction of the life force inherent in the statuette. Even Jon recognized the incongruity and was frightened by it.

But the stories.

He never remembered them. Always in the morning he realized that the moonlit image of Chloe's filmed-over eyes and achingly mobile hands was all he possessed of their night together. He had no memory at all of existing, living, *being* with Chloe simultaneously in time. The six nights he shared his room with her were, taken together, an absence. It was perhaps an incommunicable sensation, but Jon knew beyond question that the incursion of sleep didn't account for the time he had lost. He grew older without actively experiencing his own life.

One story he did remember.

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But only because Chloe told it on the last night she shared his room. And only because he, Jon, took precautions, difficult ones that required all his resistance and will and stamina. He had to know what was happening to him. Childish intuition told him he could not go on being drugged away from life, suffering the nightly theft that Chloe carried out. Only a concerted effort to remember what spells she was weaving could return to him the dark moments she stole. So he concentrated his will and remembered.

The story was about an immortal blackbird. Chloe had told it in a droningly monotonous way, with her collapsing equine face turned toward him in the dark. All during the story, Jon pinched the inside of his thigh. He kept pinching until her voice stopped and the only sound was the soft inward billowing of the lace curtains.

"This regal blackbird," she said, "lived to bear ten thousand generations of young.

"She is living even yet.

"For whenever she flew to her nest with a morsel, she broke it in her beak, sweetened it with her saliva, and distributed it among the fledglings who begged with outstretched throats. But even when she had no more to offer, the blackbird plunged her beak again and again into the throats of her offspring and drew from them their palpitating life's blood. In this way she increased her years but destroyed the creatures whom she had given life."

Then: "It was inevitable. It was her way. But the blackbird never required help," she said, almost as an afterthought. This last phrase stayed with Jon like a chronic echoing in his mind.

As soon as Chloe had finished, however, he had set to work to capture the story itself. He hopped out of bed and went to the bathroom down the upstairs hall. There he splashed water in his eyes and went over the words of the story until he had them memorized. His face in the bathroom mirror looked small and sallow. But the look of wrinkled consternation on Chloe's face when he came back into the room was even more astonishing. He had never seen it before.

The blackbird story, he somehow knew, held the key to his own ambiguous predicament. But he could not fathom the story's implications. Chloe breathed heavily all night, giving no clues. Other noises in the house indicated that his parents were still rummaging about. He did not fall asleep.

The next evening, after speaking with his father, Chloe moved into the suite which had been in preparation for her. She moved in despite the fact that Jon's mother protested that the decorators had not completed hanging the dra-

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peries. But the draperies were in place, and the paint had been dry for at least five days. Jon had checked on both these things.

In the succeeding months Chloe's condition worsened.

At last his parents took her away to Darktree. Nothing could be done to cure her, either at home or in the hospital, they said. All they could do was permit her to die in surroundings which held the consolations of nature, amid trellises and bird song, in the deep green mercies of the wood. Couldn't Jon understand how an old woman would react to the antiseptic white of a hospital, where pushcarts and syringes reinforced a dying person's sense of letting go? He could. He intuitively could. But that made the prospect of visiting Darktree no more appealing to him.

The sanatorium looked like a leaf-grown gingerbread house, horrifying in its quaintness, and he wanted nothing to do with it.

Nor with Chloe.

The old woman who had materialized out of childhood nightmares to haunt the childhood he still had left to him.

But they always took Jon with them to visit her.

And each time Chloe—who could no longer speak—demanded by means of gestures that he approach her sickbed and let himself be kissed. Not on the cheek or forehead, but full on the lips. Always she held him too long against her mouth, those strong twisted hands clenched on his shoulders, not letting him go. And the breath she gave him on these exchanges was invariably stale; it was like the odors in the upholstery of furniture in funeral homes—two of which he had visited when his real grandmothers had died. It frightened him. And as Chloe held him, he could always feel his own breath go funneling away, threatening to leave him empty. Beyond reason the experience frightened him.

But he never protested.

Because when Chloe released him at last, he would turn to find approving smiles on his parents' faces. Only that salvaged for Jon his pride. The regard his father and mother had for his mannerliness and compassion (even if both were forced) compensated for the indignity of kissing Chloe on the lips.

Now they were in her sickroom again, and he was two years older than when she had first come to their house. The old woman was propped in a relaxer bed, looking even more embalmed and mummy-like than on that first occasion. The orchard on the Darktree lawns was visible through the window by her bed, and Jon concentrated on the colliding leaves rather than on Chloe's sunken face.

But even without looking at

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her, he knew that through those incredibly rheumy eyes she had seen him as soon as they came in. He stood at the door, terrified, as Chloe stretched out her discolored hands toward him, making noises in her throat.

"Jon!" his father said harshly. "Come greet Chloe. It's been two weeks since she's seen you."

"Hello," he said from the door.

"Jon!" his mother said. She came to him, grasped his sleeve, and led him to the bedside. "Forgive him, Chloe. He's at the stage where he believes any kind of affectionate display unmanly. We're trying to disillusion him of that notion.

"Now, Jon, behave," she said. "Go to Chloe."

The old woman reached for him as if he were a piece of floating lumber, a means by which she could prevent her own drowning. The look in her clouded-over eyes was imploring, crucial, bereft of sanity. How could they expect him to submit this time? He wanted only to bolt from the room, never to return to Darktree again. But the hands were on his shoulders, and Chloe's face was becoming more and more insistent as he descended, unwillingly, to her withered lips. He could smell the orchard air.

"We're going to leave you with Chloe for a few minutes, Jon," his father said. "Your mother and I have to take care of some financial matters at the downstairs desk. Anyway, Chloe indicated in a letter that she thought being alone with you, just for a short time, might make her feel years younger. She enjoys your company."

As soon as his lips touched Chloe's, he knew his parents were gone. The door to the room closed, and the old woman's gnarled hands began steadily pressuring him into her breast. Frantically, he looked over the top of her head into the orchard. Huge shadows

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drifted on the lawn, like tidewater. Her teeth came against his. Devouring shadows beneath the trees, dark shapes that burned the light away from his optic nerves. Her tongue touched his. The orchard became a black square, and suddenly all the breath vacuumed out of his lungs, and he was plunging into a bottomless chasm. His consciousness pounded away on the flood of a dark, dark tide. He had to let go.

So he let go his painful grip on the other's shoulders and opened his eyes. He had not heard the door open, but his parents were back in the room.

It was funny. He could see them beyond the foot of the bed. Something was wrong with his eyes, though. He saw everything as if through a rainy windshield, a frosted piece of glass. Nevertheless, he knew they were his parents.

But who was the strange boy leaning over him?

He tried to speak but couldn't find his tongue. Then he extended his long purpled hands in an imploring gesture and tried to induce his mother and father nearer the bed. They wouldn't come. When the boy reached down and slapped him, hard across the face, he began very slowly to understand.

The boy's expression was gratified, drained of a long-borne frustration, and his parents were smiling fatuously. They looked as if they had inherited a treasure, a tradition.

"Being alone with Chloe was very good," the little boy said as the three of them left the room. "It made all the difference in the world."

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THE PLANE TRUTH

by Isaac Asimov

THERE ARE OCCASIONALLY PROBLEMS IN IMMERSING myself in these articles I write for F & SF. For instance, I watched a luncheon companion sprinkle salt on his dish after an unsatisfactory forkful, try another bite, and say with satisfaction, "That's much better."

I stirred uneasily and said, "Actually, what you mean is 'I like that much better.' In saying merely 'That's much better' you are making the unwarranted assumption that food can be objectively better or worse in taste and the further assumption that your own subjective sensation of taste is a sure guide to the objective situation."

I think I came within a quarter of an inch of getting that dish, salted to perfection as it was, right in the face, and would have well-deserved it, too. The trouble, you see, was that I had just written last month's article and was brim-full on the subject of assumptions.

So let's get back to that. The subject under consideration last month was Euclid's "fifth postulate," which I will repeat here so that you won't have to refer back to it:

"If a straight line falling on two straight lines makes the interior angles on the same side less than two right angles, the two straight lines, if produced indefinitely, meet on that side on which are the angles less than the two right angles."

All Euclid's other axioms are extremely simple but he apparently realized that this fifth postulate, complicated as it seemed, could not be proved from the other axioms, and must therefore be included as an axiom itself.

For two thousand years after Euclid, other geometers kept trying to prove Euclid too hasty in having given up, and strove to find some ingenious method of proving the fifth postulate from the other axioms,

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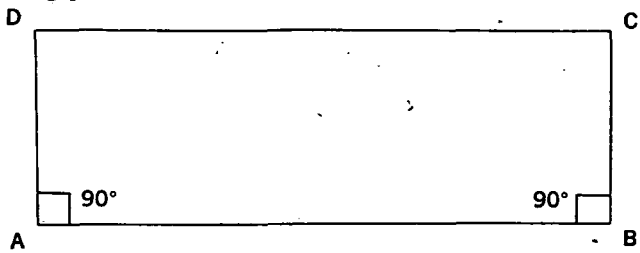
so that it might therefore be removed from the list—if only because it was too long, too complicated, and too not-immediately-obvious to seem a good axiom. One system of approaching the problem was to consider the following quadrilateral:



Two of the angles, DAB and ABC are given as right angles in this quadrilateral, and side AD is equal in length to side BC. Given these facts, it is possible to prove that side DC is equal to side AB and that angles ADC and DCB are also right angles (so that the quadrilateral is actually a rectangle) *if* Euclid's fifth postulate is used.

If Euclid's fifth postulate is *not* used, then by using only the other axioms, all one can do is to prove that angles ADC and DCB are equal, but not that they are actually right angles.

The problem then arises whether it is possible to show that from the fact that angles ADC and DCB are equal, it is possible to show that they are also right angles. If one can do that, it would then follow from the fact that quadrilateral ABCD is a rectangle, that the fifth postulate is true. This would have been proven from the other axioms only, and it would no longer be necessary to include Euclid's fifth among them.

Such an attempt was first made by the medieval Arabs, who carried on the traditions of Greek geometry while western Europe was sunk in darkness. The first to draw this quadrilateral and labor over its right angles was none other than Omar Khayyam (1050-1123).*

Omar pointed out that if angles ADC and DCB were equal, then there were three possibilities: 1) they were each a right angle; 2) they were each less than a right angle, that is "acute"; or 3) they were each more than a right angle, or "obtuse."

He then went through a line of argument to show that the acute and obtuse cases were absurd, based on the assumption that two converging lines must intersect.

**He wrote clever quatrains which Edward FitzGerald even more cleverly translated into English in 1859, making Omar forever famous as a hedonistic and agnostic poet, but the fact is that he ought to be remembered as a great mathematician and astronomer.*

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To be sure, it is perfectly commonsensical to suppose that two converging lines must intersect but, unfortunately, common sense or not, that assumption is mathematically equivalent to Euclid's fifth postulate. Omar Khayyam ended, therefore, by "proving" the fifth postulate by assuming it to be true as one of the conditions of the proof. This is called either "arguing in a circle" or "begging the question," but whatever it is called, it is not allowed in mathematics.

Another Arabian mathematician, Nasir Eddin al-Tus (1201-1274), made a similar attempt on the quadrilateral, using a different and more complicated assumption to outlaw the acute and obtuse cases. Alas, his assumption was also mathematically equivalent to Euclid's fifth.

Which brings us down to the Italian, Girolamo Saccheri (1667-1733) whom I referred to at the end of last month's article and who was both a professor of mathematics at the University of Pisa, and a Jesuit priest.

He knew of Nasir Eddin's work, and he, too, tackled the quadrilateral. Saccheri, however, introduced something altogether new, something that in two thousand years no one had thought of doing in connection with Euclid's fifth.

Until then, people had omitted Euclid's fifth to see what would happen, or else had made assumptions that turned out to be equivalent to Euclid's fifth. What Saccheri did was to begin by assuming Euclid's fifth to be *false,* and to substitute for it some other postulate that is contradictory to it. He planned then to try to build up a geometry based on Euclid's other axioms plus the "alternate fifth" until he came to a contradiction (proving that a particular theorem was both true *and* false, for instance).

When the contradiction was reached, the "alternate fifth" would have to be thrown out. If every possible "alternate fifth" is eliminated in this fashion, then Euclid's fifth must be true. This method of proving a theorem by showing all other possibilities to be absurd is a perfectly acceptable mathematical technique*; Saccheri was on the right road.

Working on this system, Saccheri therefore started by assuming that the angles ADC and DCB were both greater than a right angle. With this assumption, plus all the axioms of Euclid *other* than the fifth, he began working his way through what we might call "obtuse geometry." Quickly, he came across a contradiction. This meant that "obtuse geometry" could not be true and that angles ADC and DCB could not each be greater than a right angle.

This is equivalent to Sherlock Holmes' famous dictum that when the impossible has been eliminated, whatever remains, however improbable, must be true.

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This accomplishment was so important that the quadrilateral, which Omar Khayyam had first used in connection with Euclid's fifth, is now called the "Saccheri quadrilateral."

Greatly cheered by this, Saccheri then tackled "acute geometry" beginning with the assumption that angles ADC and DCB were each smaller than a right angle. He must have begun the task light-heartedly, sure that as in the case of "obtuse geometry" he would quickly find a contradiction in "acute geometry." If that were so, Euclid's fifth would stand proven and his "right-angle geometry" would no longer require that uncomfortably long statement as an axiom.

As Saccheri went on from proposition to proposition in his "acute geometry," his feeling of pleasure gave way to increasing anxiety, for he did not come across any contradiction. More and more he found himself faced with the possibility that one could build up a thoroughly self-consistent geometry which was based on at least one axiom that directly contradicted a Euclidean axiom. The result would be a "non-Euclidean" geometry which might seem against common sense, but which would be internally self-consistent and therefore mathematically valid.

For a moment, Saccheri hovered on the very brink of mathematical immortality and—backed away.

He couldn't! To accept the notion of a non-Euclidean geometry took too much courage. So mistakenly had scholars come to confuse Euclidean geometry with absolute truth, that any refutation of Euclid would have roused the deepest stirrings of anxiety in the hearts and minds of Europe's intellectuals. To doubt Euclid was to doubt absolute truth, and if there was no absolute truth in Euclid, might it not be quickly deduced that there was no absolute truth anywhere? And since the firmest claim to absolute truth came from religion, might not an attack on Euclid be interpreted as an attack on God?

Saccheri was clearly a mathematician of great potential, but he was also a Jesuit priest and a human being, so his courage failed him and he made the great denial.* When his gradual development of "acute geometry" went on to the point where he could take it no longer, he argued himself into imagining he had found an inconsistency where, in fact, he hadn't, and with great relief, he concluded that he had proved Euclid's fifth. In 1733, he published a book on his findings entitled (in English): "Euclid Cleared of Every Flaw" and, in that same year, died.

By his denial Saccheri had lost immortality and chosen oblivion. His book went virtually unnoticed until attention was called to it by a later

I am not blaming him. Placed in his position, I would undoubtedly have done the same. It's just too bad, that's all.

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Italian mathematician, Eugenio Beltrami (1835-1900) *after* Saccheri's failure had been made good by others. Now what we know of Saccheri is just this: that he had his finger on a major mathematical discovery a century before anybody else and had lacked the guts to keep his finger firmly on it.

Let us next move forward nearly a century to the German mathematician, Karl F. Gauss (1777-1855). It can easily be argued that Gauss was the greatest mathematician who ever lived. Even as a young man he astonished Europe and the scientific world with his brilliance.

He considered Euclid's fifth about 1815 and came to the same conclusion to which Euclid had come—that the fifth *had* to be made an axiom because it *couldn't* be proved from the other axioms. Gauss further came to the conclusion from which Saccheri had shrunk away—that there were other self-consistent geometries which were non-Euclidean, in that an alternate axiom replaced the fifth.

And then *he* lacked the guts to publish, too, and here I disclaim sympathy. The situation was different. Gauss had infinitely more reputation than Saccheri; Gauss was not a priest; Gauss lived in a land where and at a time when the hold of the church was less to be feared. Gauss, genius or not, was just a coward.

Which brings us to the Russian mathematician, Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevski (1793-1856).* In 1826, Lobachevski also began to wonder if a geometry might not be non-Euclidean and yet consistent. With that in mind, he worked out the theorems of "acute geometry" as Saccheri had done a century earlier, but in 1829, Lobachevski did what neither Saccheri nor Gauss had done. He did *not* back away and he *did* publish. Unfortunately, what he published was an article in Russian called "On the Principles of Geometry" in a local periodical (he worked at the University of Kazan, deep in provincial Russia).

Who reads Russian? Lobachevski remained largely unknown. It wasn't until 1840 that he published his work in German and brought himself to the attention of the world of mathematics generally.

Meanwhile, though, a Hungarian mathematician, Janos Bolyai (1802-1860), was doing much the same thing. Bolyai is one of the most romantic figures in the history of mathematics since he also specialized in such things as the violin and the duelling sword—in the true tradition of the Hungarian aristocrat. There is a story that he once

**Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevski is mentioned in one of Tom Lehrer's satiric songs, and to any Tom Lehrer fan (like myself) it seems strange to see the name mentioned in a serious connection, but Lehrer is a mathematician by trade and he made use of a real name.*

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fenced with thirteen swordsmen one after the other, vanquishing them all—and playing the violin between bouts.

In 1831, Bolyai's father published a book on mathematics. Young Bolyai had been pondering over Euclid's fifth for a number of years, and now he persuaded his father to include a twenty-six page appendix in which the principles of "acute geometry" were described. It was two years after Lobachevski had published, but as yet no one had heard of the Russian and, nowadays, Lobachevski and Bolyai generally share the credit for having discovered non-Euclidean geometry.

Since the Bolyais published in German, Gauss was at once aware of the material. His commendation would have meant a great deal to the young Bolyai. Gauss still lacked the courage to put his approval into print, but he did praise Bolyai's work verbally. And then, he couldn't resist —He told Bolyai he had had the same ideas years before but hadn't published, and showed him the work.

Gauss didn't have to do that. His reputation was unshakeable; even without non-Euclidean geometry, he had done enough for a dozen mathematicians. Since he had lacked the courage to publish, he might have had the decency to let Bolyai take the credit. But he didn't. Genius or not, Gauss was a mean man in some ways.

Poor Bolyai was so embarrassed and humiliated by Gauss's disclosure, that he never did any further work in mathematics.

And what about "obtuse geometry?" Saccheri had investigated that and found himself enmeshed in contradiction, so that had been thrown out. Still, once the validity of non-Euclidean geometry had been established, was there no way of rehabilitating "obtuse geometry," too?

Yes, there was—but only at the cost of making a still more radical break with Euclid. Saccheri, in investigating "obtuse geometry," had made use of an unspoken assumption that Euclid himself had also used—that a line could be infinite in length. This assumption introduced no contradiction in "acute geometry" or in "right-angle geometry" (Euclid's) but it did create trouble in "obtuse geometry."

But then, drop that too. Suppose that, regardless of "commonsense" you were to make the assumption that any line had to have some maximum finite length. In that case all the contradiction in "obtuse geometry" disappeared, and there was a second valid variety of non-Euclidean geometry. This was first shown in 1854 by the German mathematician, Georg F. B. Riemann (1826-1866).

So now we have three kinds of geometry, which we can distinguish by using statements that are equivalent to the variety of fifth postulate used in each case:

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A—Acute geometry (non-Euclidean): Through a point not on a given line, an infinite number of lines parallel to the given line may be drawn.

B—Right-angle geometry (Euclidean): Through a point not on a given line, one and only one line parallel to the given line may be drawn.

C—Obtuse geometry (non-Euclidean): Through a point not on a given line, no lines parallel to the given line may be drawn.

You can make the distinction in another and equivalent way.

A—Acute geometry (non-Euclidean): The angles of a triangle have a sum less than 180°.

B—Right-angle geometry (Euclidean): The angles of a triangle have a sum exactly equal to 180°.

C—Obtuse geometry (non-Euclidean): The angles of a triangle have a sum greater than 180°.

You may now ask: But which geometry is *true*?

If we define "true" as internally self-consistent, then all three geometries are equally true.

Of course, they are inconsistent with each other and perhaps only one corresponds with reality. We might therefore ask: Which geometry corresponds to the properties of the real universe?

The answer is, again, that all do.

Let us, for instance, consider the problem of travelling from point A on Earth's surface to point B on Earth's surface, and suppose we want to go from A to B in such a way as to traverse the least distance.

In order to simplify the results, let us make two assumptions. First, let us assume that the Earth is a perfectly smooth sphere. This is almost true, as a matter of fact, and we can eliminate mountains and valleys and even the equatorial bulge without too much distortion.

Second, let us assume that we are confined in our travels to the surface of the sphere and cannot, for instance, burrow into its depth.

In order to determine the shortest distance from A to B on the surface of the Earth, we might stretch a thread from one point to the other and pull it taut. If we were to do this between two points on a plane; that is, on a surface like that of a flat blackboard extended infinitely in all directions, the result would be what we ordinarily call a "straight line."

On the surface of the sphere, the result, however, is a curve, and yet that curve is the analog of a straight line since that curve is the shortest distance between two points on the surface of a sphere. There is diffi-

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culty in forcing ourselves to accept a curve as analogous to a straight line because we've been thinking "straight" all our lives. Let us use a different word, then. Let us call the shortest distance between two points on any given surface a "geodesic."*

On a plane, a geodesic is a straight line; on a sphere and, indeed, on any surface but a plane, a geodesic is generally a curve.

On the surface of a sphere, a geodesic is the arc of a "great circle." Such a great circle has a length equal to the circumference of the sphere and lies in a plane that passes through the center of the sphere. On the Earth, the equator is an example of a great circle, and so are all the meridians. There are an infinite number of great circles that can be drawn on the surface of any sphere. If you choose any pair of points on a sphere and connect each pair by a thread which is pulled taut, you have in each case the arc of a different great circle.

You can see that on the surface of a sphere, there is no such thing as a geodesic of infinite length. If it is extended it simply meets itself as it goes around the sphere and becomes a closed curve. On the surface of the Earth, a geodesic can be no longer than 25,000 miles.

Furthermore, any two geodesics drawn on a sphere intersect if produced indefinitely, and do so at two points. On the surface of the Earth, for instance, any two meridians meet at the north pole and the south pole. This means that, on the surface of a sphere, through any point not on a given geodesic, no geodesic can be drawn parallel to the given geodesic. No geodesic can be drawn through the point that won't sooner or later intersect the given geodesic.

Furthermore, if you draw a triangle on the surface of a sphere, with each side the arc of a great circle, then the angles will have a sum greater than 180°. If you own a globe, imagine a triangle with one of its vertices at the north pole, with a second at the equator and 10° west longitude, and the third at the equator and 100° west longitude. You will find that you will have an equilateral triangle with each one of its angles equal to 90°. The sum of the three angles is 270°.

This is precisely the geometry that Riemann worked out, if the geodesics are considered the analogs of straight lines. It is a geometry of finite lines, no parallels, and triangular angle-sums greater than 180°. What we have been calling "obtuse geometry" then might also be called "sphere geometry." And what we have been calling "right-angle geometry" or "Euclidean geometry" might also be called "plane geometry."

"Geodesic" is from Greek words meaning "to divide the Earth," because any geodesic on the face of the Earth, if extended as far as possible, divides the surface of the Earth into two equal parts.

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In 1865, Eugenio Beltami drew attention to a shape called a "pseudosphere" which looks like two trumpets joined wide mouth to wide mouth, and with each trumpet extending infinitely out in either direction, ever narrowing but never quite closing. The geodesics drawn on the surface of a pseudosphere fulfil the requirements of "acute geometry."

Geodesics on a pseudosphere are infinitely long, and it is possible for two particular geodesics to be extended indefinitely without intersecting and therefore to be parallel. In fact, it is possible to draw two geodesics on the surface of a pseudosphere that *do* intersect and yet have neither one intersect a third geodesic lying outside the two.* In fact, since an infinite number of geodesics can be drawn in between the two intersecting geodesics, all intersecting in the same point, there are an infinite number of possible geodesics through a point, all of which are parallel to another geodesic not passing through the point.

In other words "acute geometry" can be looked at as "pseudosphere geometry."

But now granted that all three geometries are equally valid under circumstances suiting each—which is the best description of the Universe as a whole?

This is not always easy to tell. If you draw a triangle with geodesics of a given length on a small sphere and then again on a large sphere, the sum of the angles of the triangle will be greater than 180° in either case, but the amount by which it is greater, will be greater in the case of the small sphere.

If you imagine a sphere growing larger and larger, a triangle of a given size on its surface, will have an angle-sum closer and closer to 180°, and eventually even the most refined possible measurement won't detect the difference. In short, a small section of a very large sphere is almost as flat as a plane, and it becomes impossible to tell the difference.

This is true of the Earth, for instance. It is because the Earth is so large a sphere that small parts of it look flat and that it took so long for mankind to satisfy himself that it was spherical despite the fact that it looked flat.

Well, there is a similar problem in connection with the Universe generally.

This sounds nonsensical because we are used to thinking in terms of planes where the geodesics are straight lines and where two intersecting lines cannot possibly be both parallel to a third line. On a pseudosphere, the geodesics curve, and curve in such a way as to make the two parallels possible.

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Light travels from point to point in space—from the Sun to the Earth, or from one distant galaxy to another—over distances many times those possible on Earth's surface.

We assume that light in travelling across the parsecs travels in a straight line, but, of course, it really travels in a geodesic, which may or may not be a straight line. If the Universe obeys Euclidean geometry, the geodesic is a straight line. If the Universe obeys some non-Euclidean geometry, then the geodesics are curves of one sort or another.

It occurred to Gauss to form triangles with beams of light travelling through space from one mountain top to another, and measure the sum of the angles so obtained. To be sure, the sums turned out to be just about 180° but were they *exactly* 180°? That was impossible to tell. If the Universe were a sphere millions of light years in diameter and if the light beams followed the curvings of such a sphere, no conceivable direct measurement possible today could detect the tiny amount by which the angle-sum exceeded 180°.

In 1916, however, Einstein worked out the General Theory of Relativity, and found that in order to explain the workings of gravitation, he had to assume a Universe in which light (and everything else) travelled in non-Euclidean geodesics.

By Einstein's theory, the Universe is non-Euclidean and is, in fact, an example of "obtuse geometry."

To put it briefly, then, Euclidean geometry, far from being the absolute and eternal verity it was assumed to be for two thousand years, is only the highly restricted and abstract geometry of the plane, and one that is merely an approximation of the geometry of such important things as the Universe and the Earth's surface.

It is not the plain truth so many have taken for granted it was—but only the plane truth.*

*Well, I *think* it's *clever*.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Readers who would like to own Dr. Asimov's F&SF essays in book form should note that the latest collection (eighteen articles) has just been published by Doubleday, $5.95. The title is THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES.

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What kind of man would be likely in a few short hours to accept the existence of probability worlds and an intelligent bear, plus take on the job of tracking down a criminal alien? Obviously a man with a compulsion for action, such as the American private eye. After all, a punk is a punk.

BRUNO

by Dean R. Koontz

I WAS SLEEPING OFF HALF A bottle of good Scotch and a blonde named Sylvia, who hadn't been so bad herself. But no one can sneak up on me, no matter how bushed I am. You have to be a light sleeper to last long in this business. I heard the thump near the foot of my bed, and I was reaching under the pillow for my Colt .38 in the next instant.

If I hadn't been out celebrating the successful conclusion of a case, the blinds and drapes would not have been drawn to make an artificial night in my apartment. But I had been. And they were. And I didn't see anything.

I thought I heard footsteps in the hallway, leading to the living room, but I couldn't be sure. I slid out of bed, stared intently around the bedroom. The pitch had changed to brown gloom, and it did not conceal an intruder. I padded into the hall, looked both ways. No one.

In the main room, I distinctly heard the rod of the police special lock pull out of its floor groove. The door opened, closed, and there were footsteps in the outside hall, going down the steps.

I ran into the living room, almost dashed into the corridor until I remembered I was in my skivvies. Turning on the lights, I saw that the police lock had been, indeed, removed. I slid it back in place and then carefully searched the apartment from the john to the linen closet. There weren't any bombs planted, so far as I could see. I checked the bedroom twice,

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since that was where I first heard him, but it was clean.

I made some coffee. But the first sip was so bad that I poured half the mug in the sink, then laced what was left with some good brandy. That was much better. My kind of breakfast.

So there I stood in my shorts on the cold kitchen floor, warming my gut with liquor and wondering who had broken in and why.

Then I had a bad thought. When the intruder had left, he had pulled the rod of the special lock out of its nest in the floor. Which meant he had entered the apartment through a window or that, when he had first come through the door, he had replaced the police rod. The last was stupid. No dude is going to make it harder for himself to get out if the job should go badly.

I went around and checked all the windows. They were locked as always. I even checked the bathroom window which has no lock, but which is barred and set in a blank wall eight floors above the street. No one had come in any of the windows.

I slapped my head a few times and went to take a shower. It must have been hallucinations. I had never had what the psychologists call postcoital depression. Maybe this was what it was like. After all, no one walks into your apartment after achieving the near impossible of silently throwing a police lock, then walks into your bedroom, just to look you over and leave. And none of my enemies would send a killer who would chicken out.

I finished the shower at four thirty and did my exercises until five. Then I cold-showered, toweled, combed my mop into a semblance of order, and dressed. By five thirty, I was sliding into a booth down at the Ace Spot, and Dorothy, the waitress, was plopping a Scotch and water in front of me before the smell of the place was properly in my nose.

"What'll it be, Jake?" she asked. She has a voice like glass dropped into a porcelain basin.

I ordered steak and eggs, with a double helping of French fries, then topped it off with a question: "Anybody been asking around about me, Dory?"

She wrote half of the question down on the order pad before she realized that I had stopped naming edibles. Dory was supposed to have been a fine-looking street girl in her day, but no one ever said she had many smarts.

"Not me," she said. "I'll ask Benny." Who was the bartender.

When she came back, she brought a negative from Benny, plus the food. I took it down in large bites, thinking about the stranger who had walked through the wall into my bedroom, had two more Scotches, and then went home to look the place over again.

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Just as I reached my apartment door and thrust the key toward the lock, this dude opened it from inside and started coming out.

"Hold it right there," I said, leveling my .38 on a part of his big belly that would split like a watermelon rind. I pushed him back into the living room, closed the door behind us, and turned on the light.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"What do *I* want? Look, buster, this is my pad, see? I live here. And the last time I looked, you didn't."

He was dressed like something out of a Bogart film, and I might have laughed except that I was so damned angry. He had a big hat pulled down over half his face, and the overcoat he was wearing might have been tailored for Siamese twins. It hung to his knees, and after that there were wide, sloppy trousers and big—I mean BIG—scuffy tennis shoes. The tennis shoes didn't fit Bogart, but the air of mystery was there.

"I don't want to harm you," he said. His voice was about a thousand registers below Dory's, but it had that same harsh sound of something breaking.

"You the same dude who was here earlier?" I asked.

He hunched his head into his shoulders and said, "I never been here before."

"Let's see what you look like," I said, reaching out for his hat. He tried to pull away, found I was faster, tried to slug me one in the chest. But I got the hat off and managed to take the clip on the shoulder instead of over the heart where he had aimed it. Then I smiled and looked up at his face and stopped smiling and said, "Good God!"

"That kicks it!" he said, his face contorted and his big square teeth thrust over his black lip.

I was backed up against the door. And though I was terrified for the first time in years, I wasn't about to let him out. If my threats didn't keep him where he was, a slug from the .38 would manage just fine—I hoped.

"Who—what are you?" I asked.

"You were right the first time. Who."

"Answer it, then."

"Can we sit down? I'm awful tired."

I let him sit, but I stayed upright to keep my freedom of movement. While he walked to the sofa and collapsed as if he were on his last legs, I looked him over. He still looked like a bear. A bruin. He was a big one, at least six feet four. His shoulders were broad, and under those baggy clothes he probably had a barrel chest and legs like tree trunks. And all of it hairy. His face was a block of granite that some hapless artist had tried to sculpt with a butter knife, a straight pin, and a blunt screwdriver. All sharp planes, eyes

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set under a shelf of bone, a jaw better than John Wayne's. Over all that: hair. No, more like fur. If I hadn't been conditioned by watching television commercials of Smoky the Bear, the sight of a talking bruin would have crumpled me like an old paper cup.

"Spill it," I said. I sounded tough. I hoped he didn't know how much of me had turned to raspberry jello.

"My name is Bruno," he said.

"Not enough."

He considered a moment. "I'm after Graham Stone, the first man you heard in here. He's wanted for some crimes you wouldn't understand."

"How did this Stone character get in here? And you, also?"

I waved the .38 at him when he hesitated, and he sat up straighter. "I guess there's no concealing it. He and I came through from another probability."

"Huh?" It was hard to make even that sound with my mouth hanging open.

"Another probability. Another time line. Graham Stone is from a counter-Earth, one of the infinity of possible worlds that exist parallel to one another. I come from a different world than Stone's. You've become a focal point for cross-time energies. If this is the first time it has happened to you, then your talent must be a new one. Besides, your not mapped. If it were an old talent—"

I made a number of wordless grunts until he got the idea to shut up. I made him go pour me half a glass of Scotch and drank most of it before I said anything. "Explain this—ability I've acquired. I don't scan it."

"It's possible," Bruno began, "to travel across the probabilities, from one Earth to another. But the only portals are those generated around living beings who somehow absorb cross-time energy and dissipate it without the rudeness of an explosion. You're one of those talented people. You broadcast a portal in a twenty-foot radius, in all directions. Not all worlds have talented creatures on them, and the infinity of possibilities is not really completely open to us."

I finished the Scotch. "And there is a—a counter-Earth where intelligent bears have taken over?" I couldn't blame this on my night with Sylvia any longer. Postcoital depression could never be like this!

"Not exactly," Bruno said. "But on my probability line, there was a nuclear war of rather large dimensions shortly after the close of World War Two. In the devastated aftermath, science survived, but not a great many people did. In order to survive as a race, they had to learn to stimulate intelligence in lesser species, how to master genetic engineering to create animals with human in-

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telligence and dexterity." He held up his hands, which were graced with stubby fingers rather than paws. He wiggled them at me and showed all his square teeth in a broad, silly grin.

I sat down. "You mean that weird characters from a thousand different worlds are going to be popping up around me all the time?"

"Not really," he said. "First of all, there just isn't that much necessity to visit your probability—or any other, for that matter. There are too many of them for traffic to build up at any one place. Unless it's such a weird Earth as to be a tourist area. But your Earth looks rather bland and ordinary, judging from this apartment."

I ignored that and said, "But suppose I had been walking down the street when you popped through? That's going to cause some excitement when it happens!"

"Funny thing about that," Bruno said. "When we first pop through, not even you will see us. We'll gradually come into your perception, and it won't look magical at all."

I made him go and get me more Scotch. After a third of that, I felt cheerful enough to stop sweating and begin to look for angles.

"You said you were a cop."

"Did I?" he asked.

"Just as much as. You said this Stone is wanted for some crime or other. Unless you're an average citizen with more than his share of humanitarianism, you're a cop."

He took a silver circle out of his overcoat pocket, held it up. It said PROBABILITY POLICE. When he ran his thumb down its surface, the words disappeared under a picture of him. "Now, I really must be going. Stone is too dangerous a man to be permitted freedom here."

Beside me were the stereo controls. I rejected a record and thumbed up the volume while he rose and pulled his hat on. When the Butterfield Blues Band blared in at top volume, I put a slug in the couch beside him, incidentally tearing a hole through his overcoat.

He sat down. I lowered the volume.

"What do you want?" he asked. I had to admit that he was cool about it. He didn't even check out his coat to see how close it had actually been.

I had already thought of the angle, and I didn't need time to think. "You're going to need help. I know the city. You don't."

"I have my own devices," he said.

"And they're a hundred percent reliable?"

He didn't answer that one.

"So you might be able to use me."

"Go on," he said gruffly. If he could have gotten to me, I'm sure

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he would have shown me how fast those blocky fists could move.

"It just so happens that I'm a private investigator. I never have much liked institutionalized police—like yourself. But I'm never against working with them if there's a profit in it."

He seemed about to reject the proposal, then paused to give it a few moments thought. "How much?"

"Let's say five hundred for the whole caper."

"You use the gun well," he said. "Agreed."

He had accepted the figure too smoothly. "Better make that an even thousand," I said.

He grinned. "Agreed."

I realized that money meant nothing to him—not the money of this probability line. I could have asked for anything. But I could not con him up another step. It would be a matter of principle now.

"In advance," I said.

"You have any money on you?" he asked. "I'll need it to see what sort of bills you have."

I took two hundred out of my wallet and flopped it in front of him. He lined the fifties and twenties out on the coffee table, then produced what appeared to be a thin camera from his overcoat. He photographed the bills, and a moment later duplicates slid out of the developing slit in the device's side. He handed them across and waited for my reaction.

They were perfect bills. But . . . "They're counterfeit," I said.

"True. But no one will ever catch them. Counterfeiters get caught because they make a couple thousand bills with the same serial numbers. You only have two bills of each. If you have more cash around, I'll copy that."

I dug out my cash reserves which were hidden in a lockbox in the false bottom of the kitchen cabinet. I had my thousand within a few minutes. When I had everything back under the kitchen cabinet, with the original two hundred in my pocket, I said, "Now let's find Stone."

Bruno checked the wafer he was carrying, and he grunted approval at the shimmering orange color. It measured, he said, the residual time energy that Stone radiated and changed colors the closer we got to the quarry. It had been yellow when we left the apartment. "Getting closer," he said. He examined the rim, where the color changes began, snorted his satisfaction. "Let's try this alley."

"This is the turf of the head community," I advised.

"Head?"

"Acid head, pot head, Zen head, rock music head—the home of those who don't or can't fit into the straight world."

He tilted his burly head back so that I could see up under that

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ridiculous hat. "Is it dangerous?"

"No. In fact, you could probably go without the hat and never be noticed or bothered."

He put his head down and plodded forward. I followed after him, hunched against the brisk wind and the curtain of snow which had begun to fall since we had begun the search.

The alley fed into the rather gloomily lighted street which ran the length of the hippie community. In the midst of the sandal shops and handmade jewelry lofts, beside one of the numerous nook-and-cranny bookstores, there was what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse—a great cinder block and corrugated aluminum structure whose two windows, high above the street, were both shattered.

Bruno checked his disc, looked at the warehouse. "There," he said. The wafer was glowing a soft red.

We crossed the street, leaving black tracks in the undisturbed skiff of white. There were two ground-floor entrances, one a man-sized door, and the other a great sliding panel large enough to admit trucks. Both were firmly locked.

"I could blast it open," I said, indicating the lock on the smaller door.

"He's upstairs anyway," Bruno said, checking the wafer again. "Let's try the second-story door."

We went up the fire escape, gripping the icy iron railing in order to make the treacherous stairs less treacherous. The door at the top had been forced open and was bowed outward on its flimsy hinges. We went inside and stood in the quiet darkness, letting our eyes adjust.

A hundred feet away, there was a rattling sound which didn't stop. It sounded like a sack of bones being shaken, but when we found it, it was really only a wooden ladder to the ground floor. I peered over the edge, but Stone was gone, down there somewhere. We had not heard either of the lower doors open; so we went down after him.

Ten minutes later, we had checked out all the empty crates and broken pieces of machinery, all the blind spots in the row of cubicle offices along the rear wall. We hadn't found a trace of Stone. The front doors were still locked from the inside. Neither one of us put away his gun. I had replaced the expended shell in the Colt and had a full magazine. Bruno's weapon wasn't anything like I'd seen before, but he assured me it was deadly.

I believed him. It had that look.

I had been bothered by the faint strains of rock music which now and then echoed through the old warehouse. They seemed to emanate from the air around us, but when I looked carefully, I found that there was a hole in one

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wall, covered over by a flap of black canvas. I pushed it back, stared into the Stygian depths, and caught more of the pounding beat of guitars and a wild drummer. I went down the steps, and Bruno followed.

"What kind of place is this?" my bruin friend asked.

I didn't like his hot breath storming down my neck, but I didn't complain. As long as he was behind me, nobody was going to sneak up unawares. "Looks like the entrance to the cellar of the building that was here before the warehouse."

"But wouldn't they destroy the old basement, level the land, and make a solid base?"

"Used to. But then they started doing the rush jobs differently. They'd doze down the old building, clear off the excess, sink a couple steel anchor beams, lay a crosshatch of beams for a base, and throw the thing up in a week."

"We're getting closer. But Stone isn't here." The wafer still was not a bright crimson.

"This way," I said, following the growing boom of the frantic music. We squirmed through slides of crumbled brick and concrete, past mashed wooden beams from the previous building. Eventually, we came to a hole in the floor of that demolished structure. It had been a storm drain at one time, but the steel grating had been twisted and popped loose by the dozers. For the thousandth time, I wished we had brought a flashlight, and then I dropped down into the cavernous maw of the old sewer system.

We trudged down a mucky length of tunnel, scaring rats and spiders and God knows what else. They ran away from us with chittering, screeching sounds of protest. As far as I was concerned, they didn't run far enough. Bruno didn't seem to notice.

At last, three hundred feet further on, there was light. An amber pool of it in the drain. We stopped beneath it and looked up. It was another man-sized drain, and the grille here had been pushed off to one side. Probably when Stone had gone through. I grasped the edges of the exit and pulled myself out of the sewer, with a little aid from the hairy comrade behind me. He got out under his own power. We were in a washroom, alone.

"Now what?" Bruno shouted. It was necessary to shout, because the band was near at hand now, and the throbbing music was like a hundred felt hammers pounding on your ears while a flock of crazed wrens circled overhead. I sort of liked it, but Bruno kept his nose wrinkled.

"Sounds like a bar or something," I said. "We'll go out and look for him."

"Not me. Stone shouldn't be

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mingling either. He looks human mostly—but someone might get suspicious. He should never have tried jaunting into an unexplored time line in the first place. It was an act of desperation when he knew I almost had him."

"What then?" I asked.

"I'll stay here, in one of the stalls. You check the place out. If he isn't there, we'll go back to the warehouse and into the street where we can pick up the trail."

"Earning my money, eh?" I asked. I adjusted my tie in the mirror, washed my hands and daubed a few spots of muck off my face as well. By that time, Bruno was in a toilet stall with the door closed. I left the washroom in search of Graham Stone.

I had to bull my way out of the washroom, because there were so many long-haired dudes in the place that they were stacked like cordwood on end, wall to wall. I had seen Graham Stone's picture on that changing badge which Bruno had, and I knew what to look for: even six feet, pale face, jet-black hair and eyebrows, eyes that were crystal blue and looked hollow. Thin lips. All in all, sort of cruel-looking. I checked out those around me, rejected them, and worked my way deeper into the mob of heads that sipped beer and smoked things that weren't just cigarettes. I was intoxicated from breathing!

It wasn't easy finding one face out of that crowd. Things kept distracting me. There were strobe lights winking every few minutes, and when they were on, I had to stop and wait before moving on again. When the strobes were off, there were slide projections and shimmering film clips projected on the walls and ceiling, and on the patrons as well. On top of that, the freaks were more interesting than usual. One dude had his natural dyed in a checkerboard pattern, and it took me a long while to fight down the urge to ask him who his hairdresser was. There was a raven-haired chick in a see-through shirt, with plenty to look at underneath. But, fifteen minutes after I had started across the floor, through the scattered dancers, past the bar and bandstand, I spotted Graham Stone working his way to the lighted doorway in the far right corner.

There was a sign above the door which said OFFICE and another on the portal which said EMPLOYEES ONLY. It was half open, and I walked through like I belonged there, keeping a hand in my jacket pocket where I had the pistol, with the safety off.

There were several rooms back here, all leading off a short hall, and all the doors were closed. I rapped on the first one, and when a female voice said, "Yes?" I opened up and checked the room out around her. She was a stacked

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redhead in a leotard, and she was doing ballet steps. Where she stood before a mirror, I got a double view of goodies.

"Sorry," I said. "Wrong room." I closed the door and went to the one across the hall.

Graham Stone was there. He stood by the desk, watching me with those cold eyes. I stepped inside, closed the door, and took the Colt out of my pocket to be certain he understood the situation. "Stand real still," I said.

He didn't move, and he didn't answer me. I started toward him, and he side-stepped. I cocked the .38, but it didn't seem to grab him like it should have. He watched disinterestedly.

I walked forward again, and he moved again. I had had the word from Bruno that bring-him-back-alive was not a necessity on this case. I tore his chest open with a slug, since I had no way of knowing what he might be able to do to me.

The bullet ripped through him, and he sagged, folded onto the desk, fell to the floor, and deflated. Inside of six seconds, he was nothing more than a pile of tissue paper painted to look like a man. I examined the remains. No blood. No bones. No insides. Just some ashes.

I looked at the Colt. It was my familiar gun. Which meant this hadn't been the real Graham Stone. Before I had too much time to think about that, I beat it back to the corridor. No one had heard the shot. The freaks on the bandstand were providing perfect cover.

Now what?

I carefully checked the other two rooms which led off the hallway, and I found Graham Stone in both of them. He crumpled between my fingers in the first room. In the second, I shredded him with a well-placed kick to the crotch. By the time I reached the dance floor again, I was furious. Any dude who would resort to some cheap magic like that wasn't playing the game square.

In the washroom, I rapped on Bruno's stall door, and he came out, his hat still pulled way down, his collar still turned way up. I told him about the three extra Graham Stones and demanded some explanation.

"I didn't want to have to tell you," he said. "I was afraid it would scare you too much and ruin your efficiency."

"What?" I asked.

"Graham Stone isn't a human being."

I almost laughed. "Neither are you," I said.

He looked hurt, and I felt like an idiot. "I am a little," he said. "But forget that. What I should have said is that Graham Stone does not really come from any counter-Earth. He's an alien. From another star system."

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I went to the sink and splashed a lot of cold water in my face. It didn't do much good. I went back to him and said, "Tell me."

"Not the whole story," he said. "That would take too much time. Stone is, in short, an alien. Humanoid except when you are close enough to look and see he doesn't have any pores. And if you look closely at his hands, you'll see where he's had his sixth fingers amputated to pass for human. There was a shipload of them that crashed on one of the probabilities seven months ago. We've never been able to communicate with them. The general feeling is that we've met a race of megalomaniacs. All are dead but Stone. He has escaped us thus far."

"If he's an alien, why the British name?"

"That's the first moniker he went by when he started to pass for human. There have been others since."

"And what the hell has he done to deserve death?" I asked. "Maybe if a greater attempt was made to understand him—"

"An attempt was made. One morning, when the doctors arrived at the labs for a continuation of the study, they found the entire night crew dead. There was a spiderweb fungus growing out of their mouths, nostrils, eye sockets . . . You get the picture? He hasn't done it since. But we don't think he has lost the weapon."

I went back to the sink and looked at myself in the mirror. Someone came in to use the urinal, and Bruno leaped backwards into the toilet stall and slammed the door. I had five minutes to study my precious kisser until the room was empty again. Then Bruno came back out.

"Listen," I said, "suppose he was within twenty feet of me, back there in the offices while I was playing around with those decoys? He could have tripped right out of this probability by now."

"No," Bruno said. "You're a receiver, not a transmitter. He'll have to locate someone with the reverse talent of yours before he can get out of this time line."

"Are there others?"

"I detect two within the city," Bruno said.

"We could just stake those two out and wait for him!"

"Hardly," the bruin said. "He would just as soon settle down here and take over a world line for himself. That would give him a better base with which to strike out against the other continuums."

"He has that kind of power?"

"I said he was dangerous."

"Let's move it," I said, turning for the drain in the floor.

"You're marvelous," Bruno said.

I turned and looked at him, tried to find sarcasm in that crazy face of his. I couldn't tell what was there. "Yeah?" I asked.

"Really. Here, in the space of a

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few short hours, you have accepted the existence of probability worlds, of an intelligent bear, and of an alien from another world. And you don't seem shaken at all."

"Yesterday, I got drunk out of my mind. I spent six active hours in bed with a blonde named Sylvia. I ate two steaks, half a dozen eggs, and six baked potatoes. I sweated out every drop of tension from the last job I took on. I'm a purged man. I can take anything tonight. Nobody has ever thrown anything at me that I can't take, and it isn't going to start with this. Besides, I have a thousand bucks at stake. Now, let's get the hell out of here."

We both went down into the storm drain.

When we got back on the street again, we found an inch of snow had fallen since we had come into the warehouse, and God had gone crazy as a loon with the white stuff. It whipped about us, pasted on our clothes, stung our faces. I cursed rather eloquently, but Bruno just accepted it and said nothing.

What seemed like a dozen millennia later and some ten million miles from the rock music bar where I had almost cornered Stone, we found some of his handiwork. There were five of them lying there at the mouth of the alleyway, all with a white, gossamer fungus growing out of their mouths and eyes and nostrils and rectums—quite dead.

"I was afraid of this," Bruno said, genuine agony in his voice.

"I wouldn't sweat it," I said, bending to look more closely at the corpses. They weren't pretty. "They're juvies. Delinquents. Members of some street gang or other. A new one to me. See the cobra each one has stitched above his left breast? They probably went to mug Graham and had the old proverbial tables turned on them. For once Graham did something worthwhile. They won't be snatching welfare money from old ladies and beating grandfathers up to steal pocket watches."

"Just the same," he said, "we have to dispose of the bodies. We can't allow these to be found. There will be a lot of questions about what killed them, and this probability line is not yet ready to be taken into the world travel societies."

"What do you propose?" I asked.

He took that strange pistol out of his pocket, changed the setting on the regulator dial on the butt, then ashed all the dead ducktails. We stirred the gray residue around with our feet and left that place. I didn't feel so good. I kept reminding myself about the thousand bucks. And Sylvia. And liquor. And how I would lose all those things if I once let my nerve crack. Because once a private rich-

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ard backs down, his career is finished. Either his career or his life.

After the plows passed, we walked in the middle of the street where we didn't have to fight the drifting snow. At first, the disc was little more than amber, but it soon began to change color to a brilliant orange. As redness crept in around its edges, our spirits rose again.

We eventually had to leave the street for the river park where the untouched snow soaked my socks and trouser cuffs. What I needed was a belt of good blended whiskey or Scotch. Or maybe Sylvia.

As the wafer in Bruno's hand grew brighter red than it had been all evening, we topped a knoll and saw Graham Stone. He was at the end of a pier at the yacht basin. He gained the deck of a sleek boat and ran for the wheelhouse door, swung up the steps and inside. Moments later, the running lights popped on along the length of the craft. The engines coughed and came to stuttering life.

I ran down the hill, my pistol in my right hand while I thrust my other arm forward to break any fall I might make on the slippery ground.

Behind me, Bruno was shouting something. I didn't listen to it. He shouted it again, then started running after me. I could tell he was running, even without looking, for I could hear his big feet slamming the ground.

When I reached the end of the pier, Stone had reversed the boat and was taking it out into the dark river. As I ran the last few yards, I judged the distance to the deck at maybe twelve feet. I leaped, fell over the rail of the boat in a tangle of arms and legs, smacked the polished deck with my shoulder, and watched the pretty stars for a moment.

Behind me, I heard a bellow of frustration, then a huge splash.

Bruno hadn't made it.

From where I lay, I could look up into the wheelhouse through the glass bubble of the steering deck. Graham Stone stood there, staring down at me, hands on the old-fashioned wooden till. I pushed to my feet, shook those stars out of my head, and looked around for my gun.

It was gone.

I looked back toward the pier. There was no sign of Bruno. And in the stretch of dark water, my .38 lay in river muck, useless.

I didn't feel so good. For a minute or two, I wished that I had never left the Ace Spot, had never met Bruno. Then I shook that off and started looking around for something I could use as a weapon. If you start wishing things were different than they are, the next step is depression, then inactivity, and finally vegetation. No matter what the state of the world, you have got to move.

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Move. I found a length of pipe in a tool chest which was strapped to the deck against the far railing. I could cave in a skull very nicely if the proper swing were behind it. I felt better.

Stone was still in the wheelhouse, still watching me. The blue eyes gleamed with the reflection of the ship lights. He seemed too confident as I walked along the deck to the steps, swung inside crouching low. I kept the pipe extended, and he didn't even bother to turn and look at me.

I approached carefully, using mincing little steps because I hated to commit myself to more than a few inches at a time. I kept thinking of the five juvies lying back there with the cobweb fungus growing out of their bodies . . .

When I was close enough, I swung the pipe in a short, vicious arc. It slammed into his head—

—And on down through his neck and chest and stomach and thighs!

There was nothing substantial there to stop the blow. The lousy simulacrum collapsed, seemed to dissolve, and was a little pile of wrinkled useless paper at my feet. Damn him!

Or should I say *it*?

When I looked through the window, I could see we were more than halfway across the river toward the West Shore district of the city. The boat was on automatic pilot. I couldn't make anything of the controls. And though I threw them at random, various safeguards must have kept anything from changing. A little more wary than I had been, I left the wheelhouse in search of Stone.

I found him by the toolbox where I had found my piece of pipe. He gripped the railing with both hands and stared longingly at the approaching shore where we would surely run aground.

I sneaked up behind him, and I let him have it. Hard.

It was another tissue paper construction.

I wished I knew how the bastard made those things. It was a handy talent to possess.

We were two thirds of the way to shore now, and if I didn't find him soon, he might very well escape us again. And Bruno had explained that a few days in any one probability will dissipate the energy of cross-time—making the wafer which detected it a useless gimmick. I looked about and decided he had to be below deck. I could see all of the planking above the waterline, and I knew the wheelhouse was empty. So I found the hatch and the stairs to the lower rooms. I went down like any good private richard learns to do—carefully.

In the galley, there was another simulacrum which I heroically crumpled with my trusty pipe. I felt like an idiot, but I was not

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about to take it easy with one of them—and then discover that it was the real and deadly thing.

I found another paper demon in the first of the double-bunk sleeping quarters and dispatched him quickly. The second bedroom was empty, containing neither a false Graham Stone nor the real one. Which left the bathroom. The door was closed but not locked. I twisted the lever, yanked it open, and found him.

For a moment, I was disoriented. There was the real Graham Stone, *and* a false shell separating from him. It looked like I had double vision, with the two images overlapped slightly. Then he growled, deep in his throat, smashed the simulacrum away as it separated from him. On his hands, ugly brown bubbles of flesh rose up, burst free, and spun at me like biological missiles.

I stepped backwards, swung out, and snapped one open with the pipe. Instantly, the last several inches of the metal weapon was sheathed in writhing white fibers. The fungus spread inexorably down toward my hand, and I had to drop the thing. The second bubble had struck the door jam, and a colony of cobweb fungus wriggled along the wood and aluminum, anchoring itself, spreading outwards in all directions.

"Hold it right there!" I said, pretending I was tough.

His hands came up again. I could see the pustules forming. The skin turned brown, bulged, leaped away from him, a seed of the deadly fungus.

One of them burst on the wall next to me, sent climbing white tendrils toward the ceiling and the floor. Cracks appeared in the fiberboard as the stuff ate its way into the core of the ship.

The second spore struck my sports coat sleeve, exploded with a bubbling froth of white growth. Never before or since have I stripped off a coat that fast. Not even when some delectable blonde was waiting for me and cooing sweet things at me. I nearly strangled myself in the damned thing, but I got rid of it. By the time it hit the floor, the waving fronds of albino death were trembling like the hairs on the back of my neck.

Stone stepped out of the bathroom, raising those hands at me again, and I turned and ran like hell.

Once before, I said that a private detective is finished when his nerve cracks, that the first time he backs down is the point where his career begins to terminate. Well, I stand by that. I wasn't turning chicken. I was just using my head. Those who fight and run away—live to fight another day. So I ran. There are times when you know it isn't sensible to take on a tank with a target pistol. Because God just might not be looking for good

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guys to turn His magnificent beneficence upon. And you'll be standing there holding your target pistol and looking at the twelve-inch hole they just put in your gut.

Besides, this creepy Stone character wasn't playing the same game I was. He didn't know the rules. Even the crummiest two-bit punk will give you half a chance. He'll use a rod or a knife or even a mayonnaise jar full of sulphuric acid. But nothing this tricky! Stone didn't have the slightest bit of respect for the cops-and-robbers tradition.

Topside, I ran to the bow of the craft and looked at the onrushing bank of the river. It seemed no more than two hundred feet away now. It was the most welcome sight of my life. On the rail next to me, a pod of fibrous death split and wrapped spidery tentacles around the iron, bored into the metal, and began to greedily devour it. I was struck with the notion that these pods were more virulent than those which had killed the juvies.

I screeched and dove to the right even while I was having that thought. I came up behind an exhaust housing. Cautiously, I peered over the top and saw Stone standing by the wheelhouse steps, his bright eyes flashing, his palms flattened in my direction.

The boat rushed closer to the shore.

But not fast enough to suit me.

Two pods spun over my head, landed on the deck behind, and ate down through the planking. Before long, the yacht was going to be honeycombed with the white tentacles, each as thin as a thread but strong, surely, as a steel wire.

There was a whining sound, like tortured metal. The deck of the boat shuddered, and we seemed almost to come to a stop. Then there was a jolt, and we sped forward again. The bottom had dragged over a shoreline rock formation, but it had not been grounded.

And then it was.

It hit the second reef, tore out its bottom, and settled into four feet of water, most of its great bulk still high and dry.

I rolled back across the deck, grabbed the rail, heaved myself over the side. I struck shallow water and went under, incidentally striking my jaw on a hunk of smooth driftwood. My mouth sagged open, and I swallowed a lot of water. So this is what it's like to drown, I thought. Then I closed my stupid kisser and struggled to the surface again. I broke water, flailing my arms, pushed up and staggered toward that blessed beach, sputtering and coughing and trying to keep from passing out. I may not have a number of qualities which modern society considers essential—like refined tastes and finesse. But there's one thing I do have, damnit. Grit.

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I was five short steps from dry ground when the pods of fungus erupted before me. Two. Then two more. A wild tangle of white snakes rose up to block my escape. I turned and looked back. Graham Stone had left the ship too. He was splashing his way toward me.

I turned to my right. Two spores fell there. The pale snakes twisted out on the water, seeking, wriggling toward me.

On my left, two more.

It wasn't the least bit fair.

The water was only halfway up my calves, not deep enough to go beneath the surface and try to swim away. Besides, if the fungus was going to take me, I'd rather it happened up here, where I could see what they were doing.

Graham Stone came relentlessly onward, holding his fire now. He knew he had me.

Then, to the left, there was the furious whine of a small powerboat driven to the limits of its performance. A whooping siren wailed to life, one of those ooga horns from ancient automobiles. Out of the gloom and the falling snow, Bruno appeared. He was standing in a two-seater, holding onto the wheel for all he was worth. The craft was hitting better than fifty miles an hour. It skimmed the water, the front end lifted into the air. Since it sat higher in the water than the yacht, it passed over the rock formations and kept on going.

"Bruno!" I shouted hysterically.

He looked like a textbook example of a man with an anxiety complex. His big eyes were sad, and he stood there, braced for the worst.

The little boat hit the beach, the screws still turning frantically, slammed forward through the sand at at least twenty miles an hour for ten feet, struck a rock, stopped dead, and threw the bruin over the watershield, across the bow, and onto the beach, flat on his enormous back.

And he got up. He looked dizzy, and he was covered with sand, but he had survived.

I started jumping up and down in the water yelling, "Get him, Bruno! Get him now!"

Those white tentacles were threading their way closer and closer, even though Graham Stone had stopped closing in on me.

The bear raised his head, looked at me, felt for his sloppy hat, then shrugged it off.

"Get him, Bruno, get him!" I bellowed.

He took out that silly-looking pistol of his, and while Stone tried to hit him with a spore of fungus, my friend the bear burned the sonofabitch on the spot. The only thing left was some ashes, which floated away.

"You killed him!" I shouted as Bruno burned down the white forest on all other sides of me. *Then* I permitted myself to faint.

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We had to dispose of the yacht. When Bruno was done with it, it was only a lot of ashes which made the water slimy for a minute or two before they washed away. He destroyed the powerboat too, every trace of what had taken place here this evening.

We got a cab and went back to my place. The driver kept wanting to know if Bruno had won the prize at the costume party, but we didn't answer him. At home, we cleaned up, ate every steak in my refrigerator, every egg, every slice of cheese, every—well, everything. Then we finished off three fifths of Scotch between us—though I have to admit that he drank most of it himself. We didn't talk about Graham Stone once. We talked a lot about being a cop—private and institutional. We talked about the types of punks there are—and found out that they don't vary much from probability to probability. He explained why my Earth is not civilized enough to be welcomed into the probability societies. Strangely, he said that it won't be quite good enough until my type has all but vanished from the face of the Earth. Yet he liked me. I'm sure of that. Strange . . .

A little before dawn, he gave himself some injection or other which sobered him up instantly. We shook hands (or at least he reached down and shook mine) and parted company. He went off to find a transmitting point to return to his own probability. And I went to sleep.

I never saw Bruno again. But there have been other odd characters. Stranger than all the crooks I've known. Stranger than Benny the Fence and Quick Fingers Sullivan. Stranger than Hunchback Hagerty, the deformed hired killer. Stranger, in fact, than either Graham Stone or Bruno. I'll tell you about them sometime. Right now, I got a date with the cutest blonde you ever saw. Her name's Lorella, and she doesn't wear underclothes.

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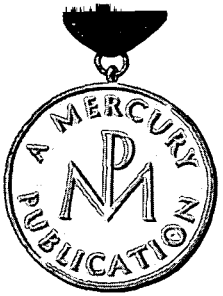

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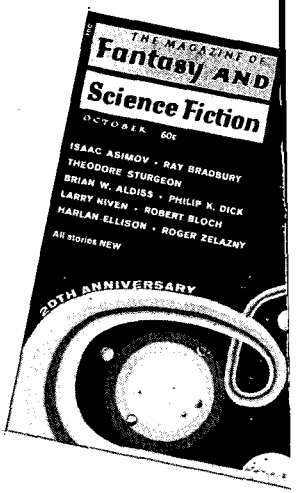

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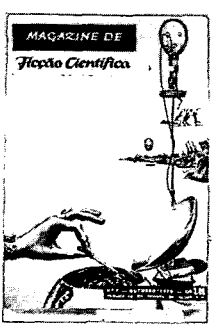

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